

The Chance of a Lifetime

By

Nat Gould

AUTHOR OF THE NOVELS FACING THIS PAGE



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THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

CHAPTER I

NETHERBY HALL

NETHERBY HALL, Woodshire, had been in possession of the Douglas family for many generations. An ancient name always commands respect, but the Douglas's were beloved, not only by their tenants and dependents, but by the whole countryside from border to border. The last of his race, in the male line, Richard Douglas, suffered from the careless extravagance of his ancestors, of which he inherited his full share. When he came into his estates at the age of two-and-twenty he had not sufficient balance to control the variety of affairs placed in his hands. There was no mortgage on Netherby Hall, or the landed property, but a rich coal mine in the county suffered, and the rents were anticipated for some years.

Dick Douglas, like his father, had very little idea of economy. He had always been accustomed to spending money, not to saving, and it was hardly likely, when he had a free hand, he would alter his ways.

His only sister, Betty, had lately married the Honorable Robert Lovett, generally known as the Honorable Bob, or by his more familiar friends, Bobby. His father's estate joined Dick Douglas's, and the match was considered an excellent arrangement, it was more, it was a love match. Bob's father, Lord Lovett, was an irritable, gouty peer, who kept a tight hand on the purse strings. He seldom left his country seat, Cottstone; his chief interest in life was attending to his celebrated herd of Herefords, his equally celebrated Berkshire pigs, and a noted flock of Shropshire sheep. Lord Lovett had an enormous fortune. He despised the Douglas family because they knew not the value of money. The only member of the "Netherby Hall tribe" he liked was Betty Douglas. This was fortunate for his son, had it been otherwise he would not have succeeded in persuading his father that Betty was the only woman he could ever love.

The scene when the Honorable Bob asked his father's permission to marry the lady of his choice is worth recording.

Lord Lovett had an unusually severe attack of gout. He had been wheeled in a bath chair to look at his famous

The Chance of a Lifetime

Berkshires, and discovered there were symptoms of swine fever in the herd. So enraged was he at this that he struck his gouty foot with his stick, the excruciating pain caused him to roar savagely, and at the same time to hurl his weapon at the man in attendance. Being accustomed to his master's ways, Stephen Banks dodged the stick, picked it up, and secured it in a safe place at the back of the chair. He wheeled Lord Lovett home, helped him into a comfortable seat, placed his foot in an easy position, and left him fuming and fretting, a perfect volcano of seething bad temper.

At this inopportune moment Bob entered. He was so full of his mission he failed to grasp the situation. He explained in a few words that he wished to be married.

Lord Lovett glared at him, he loved his son despite his hard nature, but seldom showed it.

"Marry," he roared. "What are you going to marry on I'd like to know?"

"I presume you will make me a reasonable allowance," said Bob.

"Then your presumption is wrong. I shall make no allowances for anything or anybody. No one ever makes allowances for me. What do you think has happened?"

"Nothing serious, I hope," said Bob.

"But it is serious, Sir, d—d serious. We've got swine fever, do you hear, swine fever," thundered Lord Lovett.

Bob ignored the we, and said he was sorry the favourite Berkshires had been so unfortunate. He failed, however, to see what this had to do with the proposal he had put before his father.

"I won't hear of marriage," growled Lord Lovett, and immediately added,

"Who is she?"

"It is—" began Bob.

"Don't tell me it's some girl who over-dresses, apes the man, goes in for woman's rights, I won't hear of it," interrupted Lord Lovett.

Bob smiled as he said,

"Let me tell you her name, it is Betty Douglas."

"By George, Bobby, I didn't think you'd got so much sense. Betty, is it? Well, well, I like her. She's my idea of a woman. Do you know at one time I had serious thoughts of asking her to be Lady Lovett?"

"Glad you didn't, you might have cut me out," said Bob.

"You can have Betty, I don't mind her at all. You'll not object to my kissing her in a fatherly way sometimes?" he said.

"Not at all," laughed Bob. "I thought you would have no objections to Betty."

The Chance of a Lifetime

7

"But I have, I forgot. She's a Douglas, they are an improvident, spendthrift lot, and I'll be bound she has expensive tastes."

"Not at all," said Bob.

"How do you know?" snapped his father. "There's her brother, he's gone to the dogs. Fortunately he can't turn Netherby into money, or he might sell it to some fellow who made his wealth in soap, or tea, or sugar, or blacking, or some equally objectionable but necessary commodity."

"Dick is only selling some of his horses," said Bob.

"Racehorses," snapped Lord Lovett. "The sooner he gets rid of them the better. Racehorses spell ruin. I suppose he's hard up."

"He has none too much money at present," said Bob, "but he means to economise."

"Does he? That's amusing, very amusing. A Douglas with a turn for economy, a rarity, my boy a great rarity," said his father.

"About the allowance," said Bob, "I can't marry on three hundred a year."

"As it is Betty, I'll make it six."

"Thousands?" asked Bob.

Lord Lovett glared at his son, turned red and purple in the face, grasped the arms of his chair, moved his swollen foot and gasped,

"No, sir, not thousands, hundreds."

"Six hundred a year," said Bob. "I could not ask Betty to link herself with poverty."

A scene followed. Lord Lovett's language was powerful, he dropped the peerage and became a blustering, hard-swearing commoner.

Bob had an easy-going disposition. He allowed Lord Lovett to exhaust himself, waited until he calmed down, and eventually left him satisfied, for the present, with a promised allowance of three thousand a year. When he left him Lord Lovett muttered.

"If it had been anyone but Betty Douglas I would have stuck to the hundreds."

It was a relief to Dick Douglas when he learned his sister was to marry the Honorable Bob Lovett. He had no wish that she should know how hard-pressed he was. Since his father's death he had made her an ample allowance, and had no intention of reducing it, unless compelled by circumstances.

Betty thought the sale of his thoroughbreds was merely a desire to reduce the racing establishment, she had no idea how deeply he was involved. She never troubled herself about money matters; Dick was a generous brother, he always kept her well supplied.

8 The Chance of a Lifetime

It was a week before the sale was to take place. Dick Douglas was alone at Netherby, Betty and her husband, at Lord Lovett's request, had made Cottstone their home.

He sat in his favourite room, facing the lawn, with a wide view over the park, and the stately avenue of chestnuts, nearly a mile long, leading from the main road to the Hall. He had so far taken life easily, spending freely, living in the present with no thought for the future. Not until the past year had he known what it was to be short of money.

Luck had been dead against him, his big plunges had not come off, the ring had reaped a golden harvest. Many thousands of pounds had gone into the bookmakers' pockets. He had not cut his losses like a wise man, but tried to get it back and more with it. This, as usual, proved disastrous, no man ever tilted with the ring in this fashion and came off best in the end.

At last he was face to face with the unpleasant fact that it was impossible to keep going at his usual pace—he must reduce his expenditure somehow. He loved horses, his thoroughbreds were all his friends—win or lose he never faltered in his fondness for them. It was on his trainer's advice that he decided to sell all his horses in training. Mat Lawson did not know how bad things were with him when he gave that advice. He was rather surprised when Dick acted upon it, he little knew he had no option, that the sale was compulsory.

Dick sat in his easy chair, his legs on the stone coping in front of the open grate, and gazed into the glowing red logs. There was a peculiar scent of burning wood in the room, mingled with the odour of a choice cigar. It was a cosy scene, for the night was bitterly cold, and there was a touch of snow in the air. Moodily he watched the embers—thinking of his past defeats, wondering who would purchase his best horses, hoping they would fall into good hands.

A big boarhound stretched himself at full length on the hearth rug, his master's glance wandered to him. With the wonderful sensitiveness of his kind Boris knew Dick was looking at him; he half-raised his head, blinked at him, then gently thumped with his tail.

"You're fond of comfort, Boris," said Dick.

Thump.

"There's one thing, I shall not have to part with you, old fellow."

Thump, thump.

One of the burning logs slipped and scattered a shower of sparks.

Boris started up, looked at the glow for a moment, yawned,

The Chance of a Lifetime 12

then seeing there was no danger, rolled on to his side and stretched out full length.

"Lazy beggar," said Dick, smiling.

This time the thump was barely audible.

CHAPTER II

MRS EDGAR

MAT LAWSON had trained horses for Dick Douglas's father, and for two generations before Lawsons trained for Douglases of Netherby Hall.

The trainer's house and stables were on the borders of Woodcote Heath, there were several establishments in the neighbourhood, and the town of Woodcote was a mile away.

Mat's stables were somewhat old-fashioned. The yard and house were separated from the Heath by a high wall, admittance being gained by large ornamental iron gates which were locked at night. The boxes stood on one side of the yard, Mat's house on the other, a wide space between. It was a pretty, picturesque house covered with creepers, the windows being small and almost hidden in the foliage.

The trainer's sister, a widow, Mrs Edgar, kept house for him, and his daughter, Di Lawson, assisted her.

Mrs Edgar had made an unfortunate marriage. Her husband, James Edgar, was settled in England when he landed from New York—at least so he told Laura Lawson when he married her. He was a handsome, unscrupulous man, without a spark of honour. She quickly found she had made a mistake, and rather than confess it she accompanied him when he returned to New York. Mat was loath to let her go, but had no answer to her when she said it was her duty to stand by her husband. Soon after they landed in New York her husband's brother came upon the scene. He was even a more attractive man than James Edgar and for some time he appeared to exercise a beneficial influence over his brother, for which Mrs Edgar was thankful. James Edgar was steeped in dissipation, he drank heavily, became irresponsible, and ill-used his wife, when overcome with fits of rage.

Mrs Edgar at times feared for her life, but she was in a strange country where she had no friends, consequently she was compelled to put up with him. At last James Edgar became seriously ill. She nursed him, did all in her power to save his wretched life. He became little more than a dangerous madman and the doctor said it was not safe for any woman to be alone with him. In her extremity she appealed to his brother, Francis Edgar. This man was known to the police as a clever swindler, but

10 The Chance of a Lifetime

always managed to escape their clutches. Mrs Edgar had no idea of his real character. To her he had always been polite and considerate, trying to shield her from his brother's violence, offering to protect her if it became necessary to leave him.

She was a handsome woman in the prime of life, and Francis Edgar was utterly unscrupulous where women were concerned. Her appeal was welcomed by him, he saw in it the means to an end he had had in view for some time. He at once went to see her, procured a strong male attendant to watch over the dying man, and persuaded her to go to his home, until such time as she decided to return to England—this she was determined not to do until her husband's death.

James Edgar lingered for some months, during this time his wife learned much about her brother-in-law. She was not aware at first how he lived, but chance discoveries enlightened her, and she was desirous of leaving him before he found out how much she knew. James Edgar died, and then Francis Edgar appeared in his true colours. To her horror he had given colour to the lying gossip that she lived under his protection, that she had been in fact his mistress before her husband died. This was too much for her to bear. She taxed him with his vile conduct and he laughed at her.

"Everyone takes it for granted," he said brutally, "so you had better make the best of it and stay with me."

As was only natural she resented this in no measured terms.

"You have no means," he said. "What are you going to do? Let me look after you; I'll treat you well, you shall have no cause to regret it."

To stay under his roof was not possible, so she disappeared when he was out, and the coast clear. She obtained a lodging in a quiet part of the city, where she was unknown, and wrote to her brother explaining how she was fixed and asking him to help her. She made no mention of Francis Edgar, merely related the fact of her husband's death. Mat Lawson cabled her fifty pounds and urged her to come home at once. This she did, but not before she had found out a good deal about Francis Edgar from a woman who had once been his dupe and accomplice. From her she learned that Francis Edgar was an expert hotel and train thief, a forger and bank robber, also that he was so clever that he had escaped the law while many less guilty than he suffered.

When she arrived in England she went at once to Mat Lawson's. She told him as much of her life in America as she thought fit, but considered it better to make no mention of Francis Edgar.

Mat was shocked at the change in her. She showed what she had suffered, and was a mere wreck of the fine-looking,

handsome woman who married James Edgar. Mat had been against the marriage, but did not upbraid her—he was too much of a man. He did all in his power to make her forget the past, so did Di, who was very fond of her aunt. In the course of two years Mrs Edgar became a different woman, and recovered her good looks, health and strength. She was hardly recognisable from the downtrodden woman who arrived at Woodcote from New York.

Mrs Edgar repaid her brother and Di for their kindness by a whole-hearted devotion to both. Di was as dear to her as a daughter, and she loved the beautiful but somewhat wayward and spirited girl.

Mat was completely wrapped up in his daughter, from her childhood her will had been law unto him. This had its due effect, but her disposition prevented her from being utterly spoiled.

Naturally the trainer's house was much frequented by Dick Douglas, Netherby Hall was close at hand, and he had known Di from her early years.

Di Lawson was a beauty, no-one denied it, not even members of her own sex. At nineteen years of age she was a charming, provocative, young lady, fond of her own way, accustomed to command, used to attentions, and a perfect tyrant to her many admirers.

Dick Douglas had been her friend ever since she was in short frocks, wore her hair, of which she had an abundance, down her back, and romped like a tomboy. He hardly noticed her growing into womanhood, until one day it suddenly dawned upon him she was an exceedingly pretty girl and was too big to play with. This knowledge came upon him as a shock, and Di quickly noticed a change in him. At first she wondered what was the cause, by degrees she understood, and was at the same time amused and gratified. Her mind expanded with her bodily growth, and she came to regard Dick in a different way. She noticed more of the man in him, there was a subtle feeling of pleasure in this. Love had not touched her, but it was gradually stealing into her heart, her senses, and disturbing her peace of mind.

Dick became more deferential when speaking to her. He hardly knew his real feelings towards her; he thought, however, she was the prettiest girl he had met.

Mrs Edgar saw what was taking place, her experienced eyes told her there was danger. She knew very well Mat would not regard Di as a suitable match for a Douglas. The Lawsons were an old family, and Mat was proud of the fact, but this only increased his veneration for the ancient lineage of the Douglasses. There would be trouble in store for Di, and this

12 The Chance of a Lifetime

Mrs Edgar wished to avoid, but how? It was no use speaking to the girl, it might rouse feelings that were as yet dormant. It was hardly possible to speak to Mr Douglas, he might consider it an impertinence, and yet this would be the better course to take if matters went much farther.

Mat Lawson remained in blissful ignorance of what was going on, he never for a moment gave a thought to Richard Douglas in connection with Di. He considered it natural they should be friends, they had been thrown together for many years. It irritated Mrs Edgar when she saw how blind he was. She determined to open his eyes at the risk of provoking his wrath.

She approached the subject cautiously. At first Mat failed to understand her hints. Gradually her meaning dawned upon him and then came the explosion. He was an even-tempered man, but the absurdity of his sister's statement provoked him. The thing was impossible. She had better keep such ridiculous ideas to herself, he forbade her mentioning them.

"All I can say is you are blind if you cannot notice there an attachment springing up between them," she said.

"And I tell you there is nothing of the sort," he answered.

"There is no reason why he should not fall in love with her. Di is a very charming girl," she said.

"He's a Douglas," said Mat, "that's a sufficient reason for me."

He pondered over what his sister had said, it disturbed him. Di's happiness was his sole consideration, if she fell in love with Dick Douglas nothing but trouble would come of it.

It was not long before he thought there was a good deal of truth in what Mrs Edgar had said.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN FRANCIS CLINCH

CAPTAIN FRANCIS CLINCH had comfortable rooms at Savoy Mansions which he had occupied for a considerable time. A tall, well-dressed man, of commanding presence, he impressed certain people favourably, there were others who looked askance at him, regarded him with suspicion. His rooms were tastefully furnished, a number of sporting prints on the walls indicated his partiality for racing. He had several friends, all of the male sex. The chief of these was Ben Blower, a little man, who might have been taken for a jockey.

Blower was in great request, Captain Clinch appeared to find him a lot of business to do, there was evidently a perfect understanding between them. Blower went on mysterious errands into the East End and returned with considerable sums of money.

Clinch sat in his room before a roaring fire. In his hand he held an auctioneer's catalogue—it contained a list of horses in training, and others, to be sold at Netherby Hall. He read it carefully, penciling certain numbers, making notes, putting down figures in the margin.

"Trixie," he said to himself, "that's the mare that beat me at Newmarket, she's worth notice. A reserve on her. Curious stipulation attached to it, I see she can be withdrawn if it is paid. Suppose he hopes to get the cash before the day; he must be short of ready money, but he's far from being broke if all I hear is correct. Netherby Hall must be a fine place, sort of spot would suit me. It's about time I threw up this risky game and settled down in life—no reason why I should not develop into a country gentleman. That was a narrow squeak just before I left New York, it was a big haul and worth the risk. Aaron Moss is safe, he will not worry me for some years, I wonder why he didn't split, probably because he expects me to keep him in clover when he comes out—he's mistaken."

Clinch examined the sale catalogue carefully, looked up pedigrees picked out likely horses to buy.

"I must get hold of Trixie, she's just the sort of mare to win a cup, the Woodcote Cup for instance, I guess that's the sort of race Douglas would lay himself out for. I fancy he hates me, I have given him some nasty knocks. Six thousand at cards is not a bad haul and he never suspected anything, and I have won some big bets from him. He's a reckless sort of fellow, looks down upon me as an inferior being, he's welcome to do so, but I'll pay him out, settle him, if I get half a chance. I'd have been a member of the Ranger Club if it hadn't been for him. Put his spoke in after he lost his money to me, a mean sort of revenge, especially as he suspected nothing."

"Morning, Captain, anythin' fresh?" said Ben Blower, as he entered the room without knocking.

"Haven't I told you to knock before you come in?" said Clinch. "I might have someone here."

"Supposing you had, ain't I good enough for your pals?" said Ben.

"Not when you talk that beastly lingo. Look at your get-up, it's simply awful," said Clinch.

Ben Blower's suit was of a check pattern as large as a draught board, the colour was grey, black, brown and green, his waistcoat was yellowish with red spots and brass buttons. His tie a flaming emerald green, and his soft hat dark blue.

"What's the matter with my clothes?" said Ben. "I fancied they were rather smart. My tailor said I looked quite distinguished in them."

"Then your tailor is a bigger fool than yourself. You'd look

well outside a caravan at a fair selling cheap jewellery, or quack medicines, here, in my room, you are out of place," said Clinch.

"Tastes differ," said Ben, admiring himself in a mirror. "You look too respectable, half parson, half waiter. I wonder you don't put a bit more colour on."

"I have no desire to compete with you in that line."

"There are some lines in which you cannot compete with me," said Ben. "Look here." He locked the door, looked cautiously round the room, a habit with him, and then took a small case from his inner pocket.

It was a dark-red morocco case and Clinch's eyes fastened on it greedily.

"What is it?" he asked.

"An extra special," said Ben.

"Let me look at it."

"Steady, Captain, there's no hurry. It's a beauty, real, no sham about it," said Ben.

Clinch lit a cigar, turned his back to him and waited, it was of no use being impatient with Ben.

"I managed it cleverly," said Ben.

No answer from Clinch.

"If you're not interested I'll put it back," said Ben.

Clinch blew a cloud of smoke, then whistled softly, and read the catalogue again.

Ben Blower put the case in his pocket, unlocked the door, and went out.

Clinch smiled and smoked. A minute or two elapsed, then Ben entered the room again.

"Thought you'd come back," said Clinch.

"You're about the coolest hand I know," said Ben.

"Am I?"

"Of course you are, now if it had been Aaron he'd have tried to grab it."

"Aaron will not grab, as you call it, for some considerable time."

"Ain't you sorry for him?" asked Ben.

"No, it was entirely his own fault."

"I wonder why he didn't give you away?"

"Policy, he wanted a friend when he came out."

"You'll help him of course?"

"Remains to be seen," said Clinch.

"You're a hard-hearted chap," said Ben.

"I have to be with such a set of duffers as I have round me."

"I'm no duffer, see that," said Ben as he opened the case and held it to the firelight. The gems sparkled and glittered, they were dazzling. Again Clinch's eyes gleamed as he exclaimed,

"By jove, they're grand."

The Chance of a Lifetime 15

"Thought you'd like 'em," grinned Ben.

"Hand them over."

"Take a good look at 'em," said Ben, passing the case.

Clinch examined the diamonds carefully, taking out the necklace, brooch, and ornament, weighing them in his hand, watching the flashes of flame from them as they reflected the light.

"Well?" said Ben.

"They're genuine, no mistake about it, there'll be an outcry about this."

"I'll get rid of 'em at once," said Ben.

"Where did you get them?"

"Handbag at the station. I watched her all the time. She put it in the carriage, a corridor. I had a ticket. No one saw me. I wasn't such a mug as to take the bag," said Ben.

"You opened it?"

"Yes, I've got good keys."

"Was there anything else in?" asked Clinch.

"Hadn't much time to look. I saw a powder puff, a hand glass, some handkerchiefs, a fluffy blue thing, and one or two more cases. I left them."

"Why?"

"To avoid suspicion."

"Go on."

"I waited until she got in the carriage. I saw her open the bag."

"Good Lord!"

"She fumbled about, but she didn't miss this. She was too busy."

"What about?"

"She stood with her back to the door, she was powdering her face—that was of more importance than her diamonds," said Ben.

"What fools women are," said Clinch.

"Some of 'em," answered Ben, "there's others as sharp as needles."

"As she opened the bag and did not miss them she'll think they were stolen by someone in the train," said Clinch.

"That's so. It's a real safe job this."

"They're worth a couple of thousand," said Clinch.

"Not to us," said Ben.

"Fifteen hundred to us."

"I'll try and get it," said Ben.

"We deal on the usual terms," said Clinch.

"No, this is an extra, I want a monkey."

"Five hundred."

"Yes, cash down."

16 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Can't have it," said Clinch.

"Do you suppose I am always going to work for nothing for you?" asked Ben.

Clinch turned sharply round and said,

"You'll work for me on my own terms. I could send you to join Aaron Moss to-morrow."

"Could you?" said Ben. "If I went you'd go with me."

"Not at all. I am Captain Francis Clinch. I should swear you were once in my employ in New York and I discharged you for dishonesty. More I should also swear you pestered me in London and tried to blackmail me, further I should give the Pinkerton people the fullest information in writing about the Dalton murder," said Clinch cruelly.

Ben Blower shivered.

"Come nearer the fire," said Clinch, "it is cold."

"You're a devil," said Ben.

"As you please. I want to be your friend."

"That Dalton business was an accident, you know it."

"I know you shot Fred Dalton," said Clinch quietly.

"Curse you, I say it was an accident."

"It would be difficult for you to prove it. I'll give you three hundred and you hand me the jewels."

"You'll risk buying them yourself!" exclaimed Ben.

The captain nodded.

"You don't often do this," said Ben.

"I want them."

"For a lady?"

"No."

"It's robbery," said Ben. "Only three hundred."

"Because it's robbery it is only worth that amount."

"Oh drop that, you know what I mean."

Someone tried the handle of the door. Clinch slipped the case and jewels into his pocket and sat down.

"Open the door," he said to Ben.

He did so, looking cautiously out.

"Oh it's you!" he exclaimed, as he admitted a man smaller than himself.

Clinch turned round.

"You here, Ash, what brings you to town? I thought you were at Woodcote."

"I was this morning," he said.

"Why are you here?"

"I'm short of cash."

"You've come to the wrong place," said Clinch.

"No I haven't. They cleared me out last night. There was Robson, and Banks, and one or two more playing at the Club, so I chipped in."

"Banks, who's he?" asked Clinch.
 "Lord Lovett's man."
 "The Hon. Bob's father?"
 "The same," said Ash. "He was having a night out, he does sometimes. He's a pal of Robson's."
 "Sit down," said Clinch. "I'll think about it."
 Abel Ash was Clinch's jockey.

CHAPTER IV

DIAMONDS

"WHAT do you know about these horses?" asked Clinch, handing the Netherby Hail catalogue to Ash.

"A good all round lot, no weeds, he must be sorry to part with them, he's not half a bad sort."

"Who?"

"Richard Douglas."

"He's a fool, or he'd never have got into such a hole," said Clinch.

"Quite right," said Ben, "he's an unmitigated ass."

"You shut up," growled Ash, "what do you know about him? It's not likely he'd take notice of such a piece of patch-work."

"That's one for your new suit," laughed Clinch. "You'll have to change your name to Joe if you wear clothes of so many colours."

"Which is the pick of the lot?" asked Clinch.

"The mare that beat us at Newmarket, Frigate," said Ash.

"Have you any idea what the reserve is?" asked Clinch.

"No, but it is pretty sure to be stiff."

"Is it a forced sale?" asked Clinch.

"Not exactly, but nearly so, he's been hard pressed I hear, and he won't sell any land."

"Can't you mean, he'd part with it readily enough if he had a chance, land is not much good in these days," said Clinch.

"Are you going to the sale?" asked Ash.

"Yes, I'm a buyer."

"When do your horses go to Fred Lacey at Woodcote?"

"The end of the week."

"You like Lacey?"

"Yes."

"Mind he doesn't have you, he's not particular," said Ash.

"He'll have to get up early in the morning to have me," said Clinch.

"He always does," said the jockey.

"Don't you like him?" asked Clinch.

18 The Chance of a Lifetime

"No."

"Got any particular reason?"

"He's tried to put me away once or twice."

"I see, you didn't agree with one of his horses I suppose," said Clinch smiling.

"The brute wouldn't gallop a yard," said Ash.

"Did you wish him to do so?"

"You bet, I'd backed him."

"That's different."

"Lace swore I pulled him."

"What happened?"

"He had me up before the stewards, but I got out of it."

"You'll have to agree now he has my horse," said Clinch.

"That will be all right. I shall ride to your orders, not his. I suppose you'll let him understand that?"

"He understands, it already, he knows I always give my jockey instructions."

Abel Ash grinned as he said:

"Your instructions are a trifle curious sometimes, Captain."

Clinch ignored the remark and said:

"How much did you lose last night?"

"Fifty odd."

"And you expect me to pay it?"

"Yes, you can take it out in other ways."

"You may be quite sure I shall do that, eh Ben?"

"Not a doubt of it," said Blower. "You always get your own back, and a bit more."

"What will Lawson do after the sale?" asked Clinch.

"He'll be all right. He's got money and horses of his own."

"I wonder if he'd train for me," said Clinch, half to himself.

Abel Ash laughed as he said:

"Not much, you're not his sort, he's as proud as a game cock."

Clinch was nettled at this remark, but as usual did not betray his feelings. He had seen Mat Lawson on Woodcote Heath once or twice, but had not spoken to him, or been to his stables.

"Will you let me have the money?" asked Ash.

"Owe it them," said Clinch.

"That won't do. Robson's a beggar to be paid, he never lets anyone off."

"I thought he had the reputation of being generous," said Clinch.

"So he has, and he is, but lose money to him and he's as close as wax."

"What about the other man?"

"Banks?"

"Yes."

The Chance of a Lifetime 19

"Oh Steve's not a bad sort, I only owe him a tenner."

"You say he's at Cottstone, Lord Lovett's place?"

"He's the old fellow's man."

"Then, worthy?" asked Clinch.

"Yes, there's no chance of anyone getting the blind side of Steve Banks."

Ben Blower winked at the Captain, who ignored it.

"I'll lend you the fifty, mind I'm to have it back," said Clinch.

"You can take it out of the first win," said Ash.

"Is Trixie better than my horse, the Broker?" asked Clinch.

"Over a distance she may be, but there's not much in it," said the jockey.

"I mean to buy that mare," said Clinch.

"If you do you'll win the Woodcote Cup with her. You'll have a strong hand with Trixie and the Broker."

"Shall you be at the sale?"

"Yes, sure to," said Ash.

When the jockey left, Captain Clinch said to Ben,

"Lock the door and we'll settle your little affair."

He put the jewels on the table, and feasted his eyes on them greedily.

"Beauties, ain't they?" said Ben.

"They are perfect gems of their sort."

"Don't keep 'em," said Ben, "diamonds are unlucky."

"Three hundred is your share," said Clinch, going to his safe.

"Here's the money, twenty pound notes, count them."

Ben Blower handled the crisp clean Bank of England paper, it rustled pleasantly between his fingers. He held one or two up to the light, the water mark showed plainly.

"Don't be afraid, they are genuine," said Clinch.

"Do you keep many of these about?" asked Ben.

"A fair amount in case I want them."

Ben's eyes looked at the safe greedily.

"There's no chance of your laying your hands on any," said Clinch. "That's a wonderful safe, it has a wonderful lock. Fits into that cabinet well. An idea of my own, looks like a centre cupboard, does it not?"

"Yes," said Ben, "Doesn't look like a safe at all."

"Precisely, it is let in and painted the same colour," said Clinch.

Ben Blower departed with his money, leaving the jewels with the captain.

Clinch gazed over them, they were beautiful gems of the first water, and he had a good idea of their value. He estimated them at between four and five thousand pounds, so was satisfied with the amount he had paid Ben Blower. Clinch was passionately fond

of jewels, he had a fine collection stowed away in a safe place, and they had cost him very little. They fascinated him, he only kept the best, the rest were disposed of by Blower at a sacrifice. These diamonds he intended keeping, their value would increase. He wondered why they were set in such a common pattern, he had seen several similar in design, none so pure. He fingered them lovingly, the necklace was perfect, already he had raised his first estimate. He wondered who the lady was who carried such jewels in a hand-bag, with an ordinary lock, and who thought more of powdering her face than of looking after her diamonds. He had not long to wait before being enlightened.

Next morning the papers contained an account of the mysterious disappearance of the jewels, with a full description of them. When Clinch saw the name of the owner he burst out laughing.

"The diamonds, estimated at five thousand pounds, are the property of Mrs. Helen Powerscourt, sister of Lord Lovett of Cottstone."

"What a joke," laughed Clinch. "I wonder what the Honourable Bob would say if he knew I was in possession of his aunt's diamonds."

He read on.

"Mrs. Powerscourt states the diamonds were safe in her handbag when the train started from King's Cross. She had occasion to open it a few minutes before the departure time and did not miss the case."

"Giddy old damsel," said Clinch. "She omits to say she took out her powder puff and dabbed her wrinkled old face, she must be nearer sixty than fifty, frivolous old girl."

He continued reading.

"So far the police have obtained no clue as to the perpetrator of the theft. Mrs. Powerscourt discovered her loss soon after the train left Newcastle. She at once communicated with the attendant on the car and a thorough search was made. Naturally when the news spread there was considerable consternation among the passengers, it was an unpleasant experience for them. The police entertain the opinion that the case must have been stolen before the train left King's Cross, but Mrs. Powerscourt scouts this idea."

"Good old girl," said Clinch. "Cling to that idea, my dear. Sorry I can't help you to recover your lost property. I'll take care of it for you, the diamonds will be quite safe in here," and he placed them in the cabinet, locking the safe door.

Captain Clinch knew the Honourable Bob Lovett and looked forward to meeting him and sympathising with him on his aunt's loss.

Captain Clinch had a good name among the servants who

came in contact with him. He gave very little trouble, was not exacting, his wants were easily attended to.

"A very nice gentleman," said the maid.

"Always good for a tip," said the hall porters.

"Gives me half a crown many a time," said the waiter.

"Told me the Broker would win at Newmarket. Trixie beat it and he paid the dollar I lost," said another.

Had anyone ventured to hint that Captain Clinch was a thief, a receiver of stolen goods, and probably worse, there would have been an indignant outcry against the monstrous libel.

Clinch showed the iron hand to men who were in his power and did his bidding, but he tried to impress favourably people with whom he came in contact, and succeeded in most cases.

It puzzled Clinch to discover what Dick Douglas's real opinion of him was. He had doubts about Dick, fancied he suspected he was not all that he seemed. There was something in Dick Douglas's manner that chilled the Captain, consequently he was inclined to regard him as an enemy, or a man easily converted into one.

"I'll pay him out for his haughty ways," he thought. "I'll buy that mare, and win the Woodcote Cup with her—that will rile him more than anything."

CHAPTER V

AN ENGAGEMENT

DI LAWSON had a good idea of her value, she knew she was admired, that she deserved to be so—she was not conceited, but her glass told her she was good-looking and she accepted the judgment. She was sorry Dick Douglas had to sell his horses—at the same time she was not ill pleased that he had come down a bit in the world, it placed them more on a level. She loved him, she had found it out at last, and this made her more reserved.

Mrs. Edgar questioned the girl, gradually won her confidence, and Di confessed she was very fond of Dick.

"Have you said anything to your father?" asked Mrs. Edgar.

"No, I do not know how Mr. Douglas feels towards me," said Di.

Mrs. Edgar smiled, she had no doubts on that head. "Mat has a very exalted opinion of the Douglas family," she said.

"I know that."

"The Lawsons are as good as the Douglases," said Mrs. Edgar.

"Ours is an old family," was Di's remark, "but we are hardly in the same Society."

"You are fit for the best Society," thought Mrs. Edgar.

A couple of days before the sale was to take place Dick Douglas came to Woodcote. He had made up his mind—he loved Di, he would ask her to be his wife. He had no doubt about gaining Mat's consent if she gave him a favourable answer. Money was scarce with him, but in a few years he hoped to be in a good position again, until that time arrived he and Di could live quietly at the Hall.

Chance favoured him. Mat was out and he saw Mrs Edgar.

"Is Di in?" he asked.

She knew why he had come, she thought if he and Di came to an understanding there would be very little difficulty with Mat.

"She is. Shall I tell her you are here?" she said.

"Do, please," he answered, then forming a sudden resolution to enlist her on his side, said, "Mrs Edgar, I love Di, I want to ask her to be my wife, will you help me?"

"I do not think you require any assistance from me so far as Di is concerned," she said smiling.

"You think she loves me?" he asked eagerly.

"I am sure I know the answer she will give you. My brother may be difficult to persuade, he thinks so much of your family," she said.

"That ought to make it easy for him to give his consent," he said.

"You must hope for the best, I will tell Di you are here," she answered.

Dick went into the room and waited, in a few minutes Di came in looking fresh and happy—she was very pretty.

"My father is out," she said by way of a remark.

"So your aunt told me, but I want to see you, not him, at least not at present," said Dick.

Di's heart beat fast, she knew why he was here.

"What do you want to see me for?" she asked.

"Can you not guess?"

"No," she answered, avoiding his ardent gaze.

"Di, we have known each other many years," said Dick, "we have been good friends always."

"Yes."

"You are a woman now, we can no longer act as we have done."

"Why not?"

"Because it is impossible for me to regard you any longer as a child. I have watched you grow up, you are very beautiful, a most attractive woman."

She smiled at him as she said,

"And you are no longer a big boy?"

"No, I am not. I am several years your senior."

"That doesn't matter in the least," said Di naively.

"I am so glad. Di, I love you dearly, I want you to be my wife," said Dick, coming towards her.

"I am your trainer's daughter," she said modestly.

"What difference does that make?"

"None to me," she said "I was thinking of my father."

"Give your consent, say you will be my wife, and I have no fear of being able to persuade him," said Dick "Will you be my wife?"

He put his arm round her, drawing her to him! She did not resist, she nestled against him, a happy look on her face, her eyes meeting his, her mouth close to his

He kissed her before she gave her answer, it was impossible to resist those rosy lips so near his

"Oh Dick, I have loved you for ever so long," she said, "but I only found it out the other day"

"And now you have found it out will you have me?" he asked joyfully, sure of her answer

"Yes, I will be your wife," she said in a clear low voice.

Again he sealed the contract with his lips, and they remained alone until Miss Edgar came in and said Mat had returned.

"Send him in here," said Dick

She hesitated a moment, then said

"It will be the best way," and went out

The door was opened and Mat Lawson came in, looking from one to the other anxiously

"We've settled it, Mat, with your permission," said Dick.

"I don't understand," he answered

"I have asked Di to be my wife and she has consented; you'll give her to me, won't you, old friend?" said Dick as he drew Di gently to himself

"My daughter is not your equal, Mr Richard," said Mat

"She is the equal of any one," said Dick proudly, as he stroked her hair "What objections have you to me?"

"None," said Mat "as a man, but you are a Douglas, you ought to marry in your own sphere"

"If Di is not in my sphere I don't know who is," replied Dick smiling, "we have been friends, companions, for a long time, it would be cruel to part us now"

"I do not wish to part you," said Mat, "you can still be friends."

"We have grown out of that," answered Dick. "We love each other—the days of our old friendship are past, we must live in a closer relationship"

Mat looked at Di and said.

"Is this so, my girl?"

"Yes, father I love Dick, I have given my word that I will be his wife."

Mat looked at her intently, he was losing his "little girl." She would never be quite the same to him again. Was it right to give his consent to this engagement? Would Dick Douglas make his girl happy? They were a wild lot, Dick was the best of them and he had gone the pace.

"Leave us alone, Di," said Mat quietly, and she went out of the room.

"Master Richard, this is a serious matter," said Mat. "I love my girl better than anything on earth. She is all I have. You know what your family has been, you know what you are—can I trust my girl's happiness in your keeping?"

"You have no cause to doubt me," said Dick quickly.

Mat shook his head as he said sadly,

"The sale takes place at the Hall the day after to-morrow."

"I see," said Dick, "you think I am a spendthrift, a gambler, that I am not fit to marry a good girl like Di. You wrong me, Mat, I have been foolish but I am not bad, I have done nothing that can injure Di, nothing that can cause her pain or uneasiness. I am not so well off as I was, but I mean to pull things together, and if you give Di to me it will help me, give me something to work for."

"It is not because you have lost money," said Mat. "That is nothing, I am no money-worshipper."

"Tell me what you have against me?" said Dick.

"Personally, nothing, but your name is against you."

"Douglas," said Dick smiling, "but there may be one good one in a generation, give me a chance."

"The Douglas's have been dare devils, but they have always been gentlemen," said Mat.

"If you knew how much I love Di you would consent," said Dick.

"I have not said I will not consent," said Mat.

"Then you will!" exclaimed Dick.

"On one condition."

"Name it."

"That the marriage does not take place under a year," said Mat.

"Why make that stipulation?" asked Dick.

"I want to be sure, quite sure, you both mean it, that your love will last. I want no marriage in haste to repent at leisure."

"Shall I call Di?" said Dick.

"What for?"

"To tell her."

"As you please."

Dick opened the door,

"Di," he called.

She came quickly downstairs and into the room.

The Chance of a Lifetime 25

"We shall have to wait twelve months," said Dick solemnly but with a merry look on his face.

"Father, you are good," said Di putting her arm round his neck and kissing him.

"Twelve months is a long time," said Dick.

"It will soon pass," said Mat, "the years quickly go by. You can wait, Di, wait and find out if your love is lasting."

"I shall not have to wait for that," said Di, "I know it is."

Dick gave her a grateful look and said,

"You hear that, I can say the same."

"Twelve months," said Mat firmly, "it will accustom me to contemplate losing her."

"She will not be far away at Netherby," said Dick.

"Netherby," muttered Mat. "My daughter mistress at the Hall; it don't seem quite right, Mr Richard, it don't seem to fit in with things."

"Nonsense," said Dick. "Di will be the most charming hostess in the county."

"What will Lord Lovett say?" asked Mat, with a smile.

"I don't care a rap what he says," laughed Dick.

"What will the Honourable Bob say, and your sister?" said Mat.

"Bobby will say I'm a lucky chap, and Betty will be very pleased to have such a pretty sister," said Dick.

"Well, if it's to be it must be," said Mat.

As he looked through the window he caught sight of Jim Ames, the Woodcote jockey, in the yard.

"Poor Jim, he'll be cut up about it," thought Mat.

CHAPTER VI

SALE DAY

THE morning of the sale at Netherby Hall was bitterly cold, a thaw had set in, but there was a biting wind, and occasional falling of sleet. The mansion was old fashioned, one of its chief glories being the large entrance hall, big enough almost for the ground floor of an ordinary house. There was a large open fire place in which huge logs burned, shedding a warm glow around, very acceptable on this bleak day at the end of January. A massive wide oak staircase led to a spacious landing which ran around three parts of the hall, and from which doors opened into various rooms. The main entrance was under this landing, also the windows which opened into the spacious ground where the sale was to be held.

There were bustle and noise already even at this early hour. The sale, despite the weather, drew a large crowd of buyers, for,

as Abel Ash said, there were very few weeds in the lots to be offered

It was a pity to disperse the stud, but Dick Douglas had no option—money he must have, and this was the most convenient way of getting it; horses he could buy again, but not land near to Netherby.

He kept a cheerful face, it was of no use crying over spilt milk, otherwise lost money. He walked about in a big top coat, leggings and riding breeches, a soft cap well down on his head, his ears tingling in the sharp air.

Most of the people knew him, although he did not recognise all who nodded to him.

Mark Sleath, the auctioneer, came up to him with a brisk "Good morning, Mr Douglas, bitterly cold, but that won't keep them away, they don't often get a picked lot like this to bid at. There's not a bad one among them. Hope you'll soon get another stud together, sometimes a clean sweep changes the luck. By the way what about the mare, Trixie, any chance of your buying her in, or paying over the reserve beforehand?"

"I am afraid not," said Dick, "but I should like to keep her—she's my favourite, I thought I should win the next Woodcote Cup with her."

"And so you would have, it's a pity to lose her."

"Can't be helped, they had better all go?" said Dick, "but if some benevolent man offered me a couple of thousand I should not hesitate to claim her."

"Men with a couple of loose thousands in their pockets are rare!" said Sleath, "but there's no telling what may happen, anyway she's low down in the list, number twenty one I think—something may turn up before then."

Mark Sleath was a local man, and he was pleased Dick Douglas had given him the sale, instead of handing it over to some more fashionable auctioneer—he had made up his mind he should not suffer for it.

Captain Clinch was an early arrival. He met Dick Douglas as he left Sleath, and stood in his path. Dick could not well avoid speaking to him, had he wished to do so, which he did not.

"Sorry you have to sell out," said Clinch. "Seems a pity to scatter such a lot of good ones abroad. I'm here to buy; can you give me a hint or two that may be useful?"

"I fancy you know most of them," said Dick. "You have seen them run."

"To my loss once or twice. When your mare Trixie beat the Broker at Newmarket it gave me a knock. Good mare that."

"Yes, she is," said Dick. "I shall be sorry to lose her."

"Then why not keep her, I see there is a reserve on her."

"I am afraid that is out of the question, I think they will all have to go."

"I mean to have that mare, she ought to win the Woodcote Cup this year," said Clinch.

On hearing this Dick at once took a violent objection to Trixie going into the possession of Clinch. He disliked the man, mistrusted him, he hardly knew why, it was one of those sudden antipathies sometimes formed.

"Here you are, Dick, we've been looking for you. I took Betty inside, she's perished, glad you've got a roaring fire in that big hall, it always reminds me of the old barracks, all room and no comfort," said Bob Lovett.

"Not quite so bad as that," said Dick smiling.

"Hallo, Clinch, you here, come to buy the best of 'em eh?" said Bob.

"I shall probably get what I fancy, I generally do," said Clinch sharply, then added sarcastically.

"I hope your aunt has recovered from the shock the loss of her jewels must have caused her."

"By gad she was in an awful state about it, she is still, there's no trace of 'em. (Clever chap stole them.)"

"Very," said Clinch. "It was a smart piece of work."

"You admire that sort of smartness?" said Dick.

"I admire cleverness no matter where it is found," said Clinch.

"Sneaking thieves I call such fellows," said Bob. "There's nothing daring about it, not like house-breaking, or sticking up a train."

"I had no idea they stuck up trains in this country," said Clinch.

"But they do in yours," said Bob.

Clinch started.

"My country!" he said.

"Yes, America, I take it you came from there by your speech, also your manners," said Bob.

Clinch scowled at him and walked away.

"Do you think he is an American?" asked Dick.

"I'm sure he is, I hate 'em," said Bob.

"Not all of them?"

"Oh no, but all his class?"

"He says he's going to buy Trixie," said Dick.

"Confound his impudence, you'll not let him?" said Bob.

"How can I prevent him?"

"Wish I could help you, Dick, upon my word I do, but I'm awfully hard up. You know what the governor is when he turns the screw on, well he's got it down tight this time. My allowance is six months overdue, it's serious," said Bob.

Dick laughed, Bobby was always in financial difficulties,

according to his showing. "I'll take the will for the deed," he said.

Inside the Hall, Betty Douglas was talking to Di and Mrs. Edgar, she was to be married to the Honourable Bob in the spring. She was very fond of Bobby, but did not look forward to living at Cottstone with Lord Lovett with much pleasure. However the old lord was fond of her, and she might be able to smooth Bobby's path for him.

Mrs. Edgar had just informed her that Di was engaged to Dick, she had not had an opportunity of doing so as she was in town at the time, and had only come down that morning with Bobby, who was dancing attendance upon her during the season.

Betty kissed Di fondly and said,

"I am so glad, I have seen it coming, I am sure Dick will be happy with you, and make you happy."

"We are not to be married for twelve months," said Di, "father will not allow it."

"Perhaps it is just as well," said Betty. "I shall be at Cottstone long before then, Bobby and I are to live there, you know; I only hope Lord Lovett will get rid of his gout before we take up our quarters."

"I am afraid that is too much to expect," said Di laughing.

Mat Lawson came into the Hall, followed by Joe Robson, a leviathan bookmaker, and a special admirer of Mrs. Edgar's.

Robson was a tall, strong, rather good looking man who had made a name, and a fortune, in the ring by honourable dealing. That Joe Robson's word was as good as his bond was well known, and young plingers, with aristocratic names, and big bank balances, always patronised him when they fancied there was a good thing on. It was so much more convenient to have the lot on in a lump with Joe than to make many wagers with smaller men. If Joe Robson paid, he expected to be paid, and he had a rooted objection to giving time, except to certain favoured customers.

Mrs. Edgar was well aware of Joe Robson's intentions regarding herself. So was Mat, and he had a strong liking for the bookmaker, and his abrupt, downright ways. Di often chaffed her aunt about him, and so did Betty Douglas, who loved to draw him out.

Joe Robson's brother ringmen would have been highly amused had they seen how bashful he became in Mrs. Edgar's presence; the big man, who had held his own in many a hard tilt, was only too eager to be at her beck and call.

"Everybody that's worth knowing in the racing world seems to be here," said Mat.

"I am so sorry you are losing the horses," said Betty.

"It's not on my account I'm sorry, but on Mr Richard's," said Mat.

They then spoke about Dr's engagement, and she joined them.

"Are you here as a buyer, Mr Robson," asked Mrs Edgar.

"Yes, at least I don't know. If you will tell me which to buy I'll have it, no matter what it costs," he said.

"I will not give you any hints in that direction, but you may be of some service to me later on," she said.

"In what way?" asked Joe eagerly.

"All in good time, will you help me if I ask you?"

"I will do anything for you, you know it," said Joe.

Dick Douglas came into the hall with Bob, and nodded to Joe Robson, then spoke earnestly to Mat.

"So Clinch is going to buy the mare," said Mat.

"He says so."

"I'd rather any other man get her, I don't like him, I'm sure he's a bad lot, not what he pretends to be. The men he has about him, Abel Ash, his jockey, and that fellow Blower, are no good," said Mat.

"I wish I could save the mare from the general wreck," said Dick, "but I don't see how it is to be done."

"I'll think it over," said Mat. "We had better wait until after luncheon to see if anything turns up."

"And if nothing turns up?" asked Dick.

"I have an idea, I'll let you know later on. It's novel, and risky, but it can be done, Trixie is such a quiet mare," said Mat half to himself.

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Dick, surprised.

The sound of the auctioneer's voice was heard as the door opened.

"The sale is commencing," said Bob, and they all went out with the exception of the ladies. Betty opened the window, so that they could hear and see all that went on.

CHAPTER VII

"WHERE'S TRIXIE?"

BIDDING was brisk, the first lot brought a hundred guineas, Dick thought the colt well sold, he was the worst of the bunch. Sleath had an insinuating way, he belauded the horses, and was loath to let the hammer fall at what he considered a low price.

"You made no mistake when you decided to put Sleath in the box," said Bob. "He's a rattling good salesman."

They stood together watching the lots knocked down. Clinch was on the opposite side of the ring, Ben Blower, in his new suit, close to him. Abel Ash was not far away, near to him stood

Jim Ames, looking on with a sorrowful face—he had ridden all the winners and regretted their loss

"You look like a mute at a funeral," said Ash

"Wouldn't you feel it if Clinch sold off his lot?" asked Jim

"Not a bit," replied Ash "There's no sentiment about the Captain, racing with him, like everything else, means making money"

"He's had his share of luck?" said Jim

"Win or lose he's generally on the right side when his horses run," said Ash

So far Clinch had made no bid, when the luncheon hour arrived he was not a buyer. He intended waiting until Trixie was put up, if he got her at a reasonable figure he might buy one or two more. The luncheon was held in the large dining hall, the long table was crowded, there were very few people outside

Mat Lawson looked at Trixie in her stall, he was ruminating over a scheme he had in his mind

"Don't see what they can do," he thought "If the mare's missing she can't be put up"

"No chance of keeping her, Mat," said Dick as he came up

"There is, a good chance," was the unexpected reply

"What is it?" asked Dick

"Sleath can't put her up if she is not to be found"

Dick stared at him

"Not to be found!" he exclaimed "What do you mean?"

"Hide her," said Mat

Dick shook his head as he said "That's not to be thought of"

"Why not?"

"We can't hide her. How can we get her away? Everyone knows she's here," said Dick

"There's no one about, if I led her round the back then brought her into the hall, we could smuggle her away in one of the rooms," said Mat "She's as quiet as a baby, she'll let you do anything with her, I believe she'd go up the hall stairs if you led her"

Dick laughed as he said, "I dare say she would"

"Go into the Hall, lock the front door, I'll bring her in at the side entrance. Be quick, there is no time to lose, let us act first and think how to get out of the trouble after"

Mat spoke so earnestly, and at once went to bridle the mare, that Dick had no option but to do as the trainer asked

He went into the hall, shut the door and locked it, then closed the window looking on to the sale ring, and pulled down the blind

"What's all this for?" asked Bob, "why have you locked us in?"

The others looked on in surprise, Joe Robson was in the luncheon room.

The side door was opened and Mat came in leading Trixie.

"No one has seen her," he said

"Where are we to hide her?" asked Dick

"What are you going to do with her?" asked Betty.

"Hide her until the sale is over," said Mat.

"Stealing your own mare," laughed Bob

"Rescuing her from the clutches of Clinch," said Dick, "had he not made up his mind to buy her I'd have let her go"

The noise outside proclaimed that Sleath had resumed the sale

"Lot 20," he called, and described it

As he did so there was a knock at the door

"Where are we to put her?" said Dick excitedly.

"Which is your bedroom?" asked Mat

"That," said Dick, pointing to a room at the end of the landing

"See if she'll follow you up the stairs if you lead her," said Mat "I'll go behind her, hurry up, take the bridle"

"She'll never do it," said Bob, even more excited than Dick.

The knocking at the door continued

"All leave the room except you," said Mat to his sister

They passed through into the dining hall, and Mrs Edgar locked the door

Dick took Trixie by the bridle and led her to the stairs, then going up a couple of steps pulled at the reins, Mat put his hand on her quarters and pushed her Trixie put one foot on the stairs, Dick went higher, after a moment's hesitation she followed him

"Splendid," said Mat, as she reached the landing without a mishap

Dick led her into his bedroom at the far end, Mat followed As he did so he said to his sister, "In a couple of minutes open the door"

"Pull the mattress off the bed," said Mat, taking the bridle from Dick

He did so, and Mat led the mare on to it

"If she stamps it will make no noise," he said "We'll stay here until the coast's clear"

"It's a risky game we are playing," said Dick, half inclined to laugh at the novelty of the situation

"Hush," said Mat, "She'll be opening the door"

"No one will hear us in the hall," said Dick, "the walls and the door are massive, no sound comes in here."

Mrs Edgar waited until all was safe, then opened the door, and Captain Clinch entered the hall.

32 The Chance of a Lifetime

For a brief moment they looked at each other. Mrs Edgar was too astonished to speak. Was this some horrible vision? Was she suddenly bereft of her senses? She grasped the situation, trembled in every limb, her face blanched, her eyes had a frightened look in them.

Captain Clinch staggered back, quickly recovered himself, and looked at her with a sardonic smile.

Mrs Edgar was face to face with the man of all others she most dreaded. As she still looked at him the whole of her terrible life in New York came vividly before her mind, in ten seconds she felt she had lived as many years.

It was Francis Edgar who faced her in the hall.

"You here!" she gasped, when she recovered her speech "You!"

"Yes it's me," said Clinch harshly, then he realised his danger. Stepping forward he took her by the wrist, then looked round the hall—there was no one present, here was his opportunity, but there was not a moment to be lost, no telling how soon someone would appear on the scene.

"Listen to me," he said quickly, in a threatening tone. "I am Captain Francis Clinch. You understand. If you say one word, give a hint as to who, and what I am, I'll expose you. I'll tell the whole company that you lived under my protection in New York before your husband died, that you were living with me for months after his death as my wife."

She shuddered.

"You will not do that," she said in a faint voice.

"I will, and more. I'll say you poisoned your husband, that I knew of it, that you did it to come to me," said Clinch savagely.

"You dare not," she whispered as she looked fearfully around, and glanced at the room above, in which the mare was concealed.

"I dare do anything to retain the position I have gained here—in England," he said.

She knew of what he was capable. It flashed over her in a moment what would be the effect of such a disclosure. Her brother Mat, what would he think, what would Di, Betty, Bob, Dick, Joe Robson, all of them think if he made this awful charge against her? She could not face it, it was a lie, a wicked devilish lie, and she could not stand against it. Protest as she might appearances were against her, there was just sufficient truth in his accusation to colour the lie, she had been under his roof, been protected by him, but not as he said, until she found him out.

"Will you be silent?" he said, squeezing her wrist until it hurt her.

"I must," she said.

"You have chosen well. If you keep silent, so will I, if you speak I will ruin you," he said.

"I will not speak," she said in an agitated voice. "You are safe so far as I am concerned."

He knew she dare not betray him, the result to her would be disastrous.

He dropped her wrist and as he did so Joe Robson and three or four people came in at the door. The bookmaker looked at Miss Edgar, he was surprised at the change in her. She might have seen a ghost.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked, and unable to answer him, she shook her head.

"The mare's gone, Trixie," said Clinch. "I asked her if she knew about it. She is much upset, naturally. Where is the mare?" he asked in a loud angry voice.

The clamor outside increased. "Where's Trixie, where's the mare?" was shouted by a dozen voices.

"Where is Mr Douglas?" said Sleath, entering the hall—he was as much in the dark as anyone.

Mrs Edgar shook her head, but did not speak.

"This is a serious matter," he said. "The mare has disappeared."

"Search for her," said Clinch angrily. "Blower, where are you?"

"Here," said Ben, sidling up to him.

"Look all round the place for Trixie and Dick Douglas, they have gone together."

"Do you mean to insinuate Mr Douglas has taken the mare away?" drawled Bob in his laziest tones.

"He's bolted with her," said Clinch.

"He's no horse thief," said Bob meaningly.

"D—n you," roared Clinch, as he rushed out of the hall. "I'll find her. She shall be put up, or I'll make it hot for him."

"This is a serious matter," said Sleath.

"Wait a bit, go on with the other lots," said Bob. "Pacify them, Sleath. Use your eloquence. Tell 'em Trixie will be put up later on, tell 'em what you like. You're a friend of Mr Douglas's, he wants the mare if he can. One good turn deserves another; he gave you the sale, didn't he?"

"He did, sir, and by jove I'll see him through," said Sleath, as he went out to face the crowd.

Betty went up to Bob, placed her hand on his arm, looked up into his face and said:

"You did that remarkably well, Bobby, you're a dear."

CHAPTER VIII

A BUNDLE OF NOTES

THE sale proceeded, Sleath quietened the crowd by telling them the mare would be put up for sale later in the day.

"Where is she?" asked Clinch, who refused to be silent.

Sleath took no notice of him, but went on with his work. This angered Clinch still more, he became convinced the auctioneer was a party to the spiriting away of the mare. High and low Ben Blower searched, so did Abel Ash, Clinch wandered all over the place.

When the hall was empty, Dick and Mat came downstairs.

"Will she be all right up there?" asked Dick.

"Safe and well—hi'len," said Mat, smiling. "I am rather enjoying this."

"There'll be trouble over it."

"I don't see how there can be, at any rate the mare's gone. Perhaps you'll get the reserve, the amount, before the day's out."

"Not likely," said Dick. "Who will lend me a couple of thousand?"

"I would if I had the ready money," said Mat.

Dick knew this was true and judged Mat was not well off, probably he had been hard hit by the stable losses last year, the trainer was fond of a flutter.

They remained in the hall listening to the bids, the door was open, they had a good view. All was bustle and animation, people passed to and fro constantly.

"Clinch is searching high and low for you, and here you are," said Jim Ames, as he saw Dick inside the doorway.

"I have been here a long time," said Dick smiling.

Jim came close to him and said in a whisper.

"Where's the mare?"

"Never mind, Jim, you'll know all about it later on," said Dick.

The hammer fell on the last lot, the auctioneer left the box and Clinch demanded that the mare should be put up, or the reserve price paid down for her by Dick Douglas.

While the argument was going on outside Mrs. Edgar was in earnest conversation with Joe Robson in the hall. They had been talking for some time, she was evidently explaining something to him and the bookmaker's face showed he realised the humorous side of her remark.

"You'll let me have the money, Joe—I mean Mr. Robson," she said with a bright smile that captivated him. She was still suffering from the shock caused by her unexpected meeting with Clinch, but she bore up bravely, concealing her feelings.

"I wish you'd always call me Joe," he said.

"Perhaps I may some day, live in hope," she answered

"Two thousand, you say?" said Joe.

"Yes, mind I only want you to lend it me"

"We'll say nothing about that. I stuffed a lot of hundred pound notes into my pocket this morning I came prepared to buy something," he said

"And you have not, it is my fault"

"No indeed, I'd much sooner talk to you than bid."

He was counting out the notes and she said,

"Do not let anyone see you give them to me"

He rolled them in a bundle, slipped them into her hand, saying,

"There's twenty of them Will that be sufficient?"

"Yes, you can't think how I thank you, if ever I can do anything for you I will"

"You can make me the happiest man alive," said Joe

Captain Clinch caught sight of Dick Douglas and rushed into the hall, followed by Sleath and several more

"Where's the mare?" asked Clinch savagely.

Dick took no notice of him

"I demand that the mare *Tunie* shall be put up for sale, whether she is produced or not," he said.

"I cannot sell her if she is not to be found," said Sleath.

"It's a swindle," said Clinch "She's been taken away by someone, he knows where she is," pointing at Dick

Mrs Edgar beckoned to Di, Joe Robson was with her, and the three stood in the background talking earnestly From time to time Mrs Edgar glanced at Clinch, the mere presence of the man terrified her

Joe Robson's occupation made him an excellent shrewd judge of men and women, he saw Mrs Edgar's face, noted the changes in it, watched her furtive looks at Clinch, and wondered if the captain was the cause of her uneasiness, if so he might be of service to her in another way this time, he intended to wait and see how things developed

Captain Clinch was a cool hand, if he lost his temper for a moment he quickly recovered it. He felt this time he had right on his side, it was a new experience, the mare ought not to have been removed He admired the cleverness with which it had been done, wondered whether Dick or Mat was responsible for it, or both.

He knew Sleath was in an awkward position, so appealed to him.

The auctioneer had no wish to oblige Clinch at the expense of Dick Douglas, but he knew the mare ought to have been submitted.

Crossing over to Dick, he said.

"Don't you think I had better put her up?"

"No," said Dick "Let things go on as they are for a time."

The delay irritated Clinch, again he asked Dick where the mare was

"You take it for granted I took her out of her stall," said Dick

"Of course you did, who else would?"

"You are mistaken, I did not," said Dick

"But you know where she is I'll bet," said Clinch.

"The mare's gone and you can't buy her," said Dick.

Clinch turned to the auctioneer and said,

"If he does not produce the reserve price in ten minutes will you put her up? How much is it?"

"Two thousand," said Sleath

Clinch laughed as he said sarcastically,

"And will none of his aristocratic friends lend him such a paltry sum?"

"I think the amount ought to be paid," said Sleath.

Clinch waited, if the mare was put up she might not bring that amount, she was worth it, but as she was missing she might be knocked down for a much smaller sum—he had no intention of giving more than he could help

Dick Douglas looked gloomy, he saw no way out of the difficulty

"The time has gone, can you put up the money?" said Clinch

"No

"Then I demand that the mare ~~THAT~~ be sold If I buy her I'll find her, I'll take that risk willingly There's no one to help him, no one to produce the cash," laughed Clinch

At this moment Di came forward

"You are mistaken," she said, "the money is ready to be produced"

They all stared at her in amazement She made a charming picture, her face glowed with excitement and happiness—even Clinch was momentarily overcome Jim Ames looked on curiously He was very fond of Di, had hopes in that direction He did not know she was engaged to Dick, he had not heard of it What was she going to do? Had she the money?

This thought caused him some uneasiness He knew Dick Douglas and she were great friends, he also knew it was improbable that Lawson would sanction any stronger tie between them Up to now he fancied the trainer favoured his chance.

"That's a likely tale," said Clinch "Who has the money?"

"I have," said Di, flourishing the bundle of notes given her by Mrs Edgar, who had received them from Joe Robson.

"Here they are," she said, handing them to Dick. "Take them and pay for the mare"

Dick Douglas was amazed and well he might be Where had Di got the money from? Could he accept it from her?

She saw his hesitation and said in a low voice,

"What is mine is yours, Dick. Take it, you must."

"I cannot," he said, "it would not be right."

"Then I shall take the matter into my hands," she said. "Here are two thousand pounds in notes, Mr. Sleath, the mare Trixie is Mr. Douglas's property at the reserve price."

"Quite correct," said Sleath, looking at her admiringly, and taking the money.

The hall was full of people, when they realised what Di Lawson had done a cheer broke from them—the merit of her action was fully recognised.

Mat could not make it out. Where had Di obtained two thousand pounds? Captain Clinch was defeated, there was no chance of obtaining possession of Trixie.

So he made the best of it and went away, but he vowed he would be even with Dick Douglas for this, and swore to himself he should not win the Woodcote Cup with her.

"That's what he did it for," he thought. "I wonder where he hid her—precious clever anyway. I'd like to find out, just from curiosity."

Dick waited until he had an opportunity of speaking to Di alone, then said, "How can I ever repay you, Di? You can't think how I wanted to keep Trixie."

"I know," she said, "and I am so glad it is all right. You must not ask me where I got the money from, that is a secret."

"But you'll tell me some day?" he said.

"When we are married," answered Di with a merry laugh.

It was more difficult to deal with Mat. He insisted when they arrived home upon being told who gave Di the money.

At last, under a pledge of secrecy, Mrs. Logan explained that Joe Robson advanced the money to her and she had given it to Di in order that she might do Dick a good turn.

"So it was Joe Robson," said Mat, then added, "I always knew Joe was a downright good sort."

CHAPTER IX

"WHAT IS IT?"

FRED LACE was glad to have Captain Clinch's horses in his stable. He had suffered from lack of patrons, owners declined to take the risks he ran, with or without their consent, and removed their horses.

Clinch had no desire to live in such a quiet place as Woodcote, but he took rooms in the village, and came there the week after his horses arrived.

One of the first animals he saw on the Heath was Trixie,

looking in fine healthy condition, a model thoroughbred mare. How he wished he had been able to secure her at the sale. He was very bitter about it. His horse, the Broker, was being specially trained with a view to winning the Woodcote Cup. Had he been the owner of Trixie the race would have been a certainty for him, and he could have organised one of the nice little "ramps" for which he was famous. Clinch had no idea of honour, on the turf or off, nor did he put sport before profit. Racing was merely a game at which he hoped to make money by fair means or foul. He was one of those men who bring discredit on sport for which innocent people suffer. His reputation on the turf was already well known, and there were many men who prophesied that he would get into trouble before long. When it was made public that Fred Lace was to have his horses, and Abel Ash continue to ride for him, some desperate things were looked forward to.

Lace was a clever man, an excellent judge, and might have been almost at the top of his profession, if not quite, had he gone straight. He knew the Broker was a good horse, a trial soon convinced him he had made no mistake.

"If we could only get rid of Trixie," he said to Clinch, "the Cup would be a good thing."

"I was swindled out of the mare," said Clinch, angrily.

"They managed that bit of business well," said Lace. "I did not have given old Mat credit for it. I wonder where they put her, they had no time to take her far. Besides, one of my lads says he saw her not half an-hour after the sale closed."

"Where did he see her?" asked Clinch.

"Being led back to her box by one of the lads."

Woodcote Heath was an enormous stretch of land, undulating, with splendid gallops. Mat Lawson worked his horses on one side, Fred Lace on the opposite—they seldom saw much of each other.

Captain Clinch at once set about securing some popularity in Woodcote. Most of the houses in the surrounding country were owned by rich men of good families, and Clinch knew there was very little chance of obtaining an entrance to any of them, he therefore wasted nothing in the attempt but spent his time and money in making acquaintance with the race set. This was not difficult for, despite his bad character he had a pleasant, insinuating, somewhat superior manner which impressed many people.

Mrs Doubleday, of Acacia Villa, where the Captain had rooms, thought him a very nice gentleman, after she had known him twenty-four hours. Her daughter Lottie was of the same opinion; she was a pretty, inquisitive, rather cheeky, and showy girl of twenty, who wore gay clothes, and enormous hats quite out of keeping with her station in life.

Clinch took the trouble to try and please Mrs Doubleday. Probably her daughter had something to do with this, he was not likely to overlook any chance he might have of fascinating her.

Ben Blower came to Woodcote and called at Acacia Villa, but was not allowed to remain there, much to his disgust.

"There's no room," said Clinch. "You can go to the 'Black Horse,' it is far more suitable for you."

"But there is a room vacant here," remonstrated Ben.

"I say there is not, that is sufficient," said Clinch.

Blower grumbled, but obeyed as usual, it was useless trying to argue with the Captain.

"I have a most important matter to discuss with you," said Clinch. "Come to-night and bring Ash with you."

"Name the time," said Ben, "and we'll be here."

"Nine o'clock, we go to bed early," said Clinch.

"Wonder what he's up to?" said Ash, when Ben told him about the appointment.

"You never can tell," said Blower. "He's a very mysterious customer."

"You knew him in New York, did you not?" asked Ash.

"Yes, for several years, we've been pals for a long time," said Ben.

"You mean you've been his lackey for years?"

"Nothing of the kind," said Ben indignantly, "he keeps nothing from me, we are on a most friendly footing."

"All I can say is it didn't look like it when I saw you at Savoy Mansions the other day," said Ash.

Punctually at nine they arrived at Acacia Villa, Captain Clinch had a little surprise prepared for them in the shape of a good supper and some choice wine.

Ben smacked his lips and his wolfish eyes gleamed as he saw the table spread with good things.

"He's got something big on, going to this expense," thought Ben.

By the time the meal was over Blower and Ash were in a very good humour, they had "done themselves well," and felt a comfortable glow of satisfaction and pleasure stealing over them.

Clinch eyed them steadily. He had a daring proposal to make, one fraught with considerable risk, but possible of accomplishment if skilfully and secretly carried out. Would they be equal to the task, rise to the occasion? Ben Blower had plenty of audacity and Ash was no coward, he had proved this, but they had never been engaged in anything quite so hazardous as the plot he was about to disclose.

"Trixie's doing well," said Clinch.

40 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Splendidly," said Ash, "pity you missed her."

"So I think."

"Bootiful mare," said Ben solemnly

"Will she beat the Broker in the Cup?" asked Clinch.

"I shouldn't like to have much on yours against her," said Ash

"Then you consider her better than the Broker?" said Clinch.

"He's a good horse, but she's an exceptional mare. Why are you so anxious to win the Woodcote Cup when you could pick up a big handicap with him?" asked Ash.

"For reasons of my own"

"It's throwing away a big chance," said the jockey, shaking his head

Clinch in a rash moment had made several heavy wagers that he'd win the Woodcote Cup; this was one of his reasons for wishing to purchase Trixie at the sale. It was at the Atlas Club and Joe Robson and one or two more had taken advantage of his boasting to draw him into making three or four big wagers. It was an important matter for him to win this cup, it meant a loss of some thousands if he failed—many times had he cursed his rashness, also the men who had drawn him on.

"You must understand that it means thousands of pounds to me if I win the Cup," said Clinch, "then you will comprehend why I make a rather daring and dangerous proposal to you"

Ben Blower straightened himself in his chair, lit another cigar, helped himself to spirits, and said,

"Let's hear what you intend doing. The bigger the risk the more the plunder"

"You shall both be well paid if the Broker wins the Cup," said Clinch

"Does the scheme depend on that?" asked Ash

"Yes, the Broker must win"

"Then I expect it's something to do with Trixie," said the jockey

"It has. Do you think there's a chance of getting at Jim Ames?" asked Clinch

"No," said Ash decidedly

"Why not, most jockeys can be bought," sneered Clinch

Abel Ash moved uneasily in his chair, then said angrily, "You've no cause to say that, jockeys are as straight as other folks"

"Don't get angry," said Clinch, "the remark did not apply to you."

"Of course not," said Ben, "Abel never did a wrong thing in his life"

"Shut up," said Abel. "We're not sneak thieves anyway."

"Who's a thief," roared Ben, rising from his chair.

"Keep quiet, you fools," said Clinch angrily. "I didn't bring you here to quarrel. I have an idea Ames can be got at; if not, we must try my other scheme."

"What's that? Let's hear it," said Ash.

"We must get hold of the mare somehow. Dick Douglas sneaked her away from the sale, we must get her away from Lawson."

Ben and Abel looked at one another, then the latter said,

"You mean, steal the mare?"

"Take her away and hide her until the race is over," said Clinch.

"Not actually keep her?" said Ash.

"No, return her after the Broker has won."

"Where can you put her, even if we get her?" said Ben.

"I leave that to me, I know the very place for her," said Clinch, "where they would never find her."

"It will be impossible to get her away," said Ash.

"Not so difficult as you think," said Clinch, who went on to explain how it could be done. This took a considerable time, and both Ben and Abel said there was too much risk attaching to it.

"Think how well you will be paid when the Broker wins," said Clinch.

"How much?" asked Ben.

"Five hundred each, and Abel another hundred for riding the winner."

"It all depends on the Broker, I don't like that," said Ben.

"But there's nothing to beat him with Trixie out of the way," said Clinch, "ask Abel if there is."

"It ought to be a cert," said Abel. "I'm willing to risk being said in that way."

"Try Ames first," said Clinch.

"Does he know Lawson's girl is engaged to Dick Douglas?"

"I expect he's discovered that before now," said Abel.

"Then he'll not be very friendly towards him," said Clinch.

"No, I don't suppose he will," said Abel. "I've got another idea, it might give Jim a chance of winning the girl after all."

"What is it?" asked Clinch.

CHAPTER X

SEEDS OF DISCORD

It was not long before Jim Ames heard of Di's engagement to Dick Douglas, and although he half expected it the news came upon him like a thunderclap.

Mat Lawson noticed a chance in him, Jim went about his work in a half-hearted way, and the trainer was sorry for him. He was aware of his affection for Di and had it not been for Dick Douglas standing in the way, he would have had no objection to Jim being his son-in-law.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked Mat kindly, "you look a bit crestfallen, not so bright and cheerful as usual."

"I'm all right," said Jim, "feel a bit lipped, that's all."

Di was of course aware that Jim Ames was fond of her. She liked him, but her heart was given to Dick Douglas and there was an end of it. She had no desire to avoid Jim, on the contrary she wished still to be his friend.

Abel Ash frequently met Jim in Woodcote. Soon after his conversation with Chech he met Jim and proceeded to put in action the plan he mentioned at Acacia Villa. After a brief conversation Abel said,

"I suppose you know Miss Lawson is engaged to Mr Douglas."

"Yes, I know," said Jim gruffly.

"Thought you were a bit sweet in that quarter," said Abel.

"And supposing I was what's that to do with anyone?" snapped Jim.

"She'd better have had you than him, Jim, she'll never be happy," said Abel.

"Why not?" He's a good sort," said Jim.

"In his way no doubt, but it's not the way to make a woman happy," said Ash. "The Douglas's are a wild lot, and he's as fond of the women as any of them ever were."

"How do you know?" asked Jim suspiciously.

"As far as knowing, there's not much to go on," said Abel, "but a fellow can't help seeing things."

"What do you mean? What have you seen?" asked Jim.

"Mrs Edgar's a fine handsome woman, on the right side as regards years," said Ash.

"Well," said Jim.

"They're often in town together, travel by the same train, in the same carriage, not so long ago they were away for a night, came back next day. I wouldn't say there's anything wrong, I'd not like to say it, but it looks bad, wonder old Mat doesn't speak to her about it," said Abel.

"What rot you talk," said Jim.

"Rot or not, if I were in love with a girl I'd try and get her, she ought to know about it."

"Who?"

"Miss Lawson."

"You don't suppose I'd give her a hint about such silly scandal?"

"No, of course not, but still she ought to know. Why not tell Mat?"

Jim Ames laughed as he said, "Much notice he'd take of it."

"It'll be common talk before long and then she'll hear of it," said Abel.

Jim left him and Ash thought "He'll brood over that, he'll tell her if he gets half a chance, then the fat will be in the fire. It's surprising what a fellow will do when he's in love, shouldn't wonder if he throws Douglas over at the last moment, he might do it if Clinch works his cards right."

As Jim Ames passed the station the London train stopped, and he saw Dick Douglas and Mrs Edgar get into the same compartment, naturally he thought of what Abel Ash had said.

Dick frequently went up to town and Mrs Edgar, as Mat's housekeeper, did most of the shopping in London—they often met and travelled together. Dick was nothing loath to have such a bright companion, and Mrs Edgar liked to talk to him about Di.

Jim walked on, pondering over what Abel Ash had said, and as he entered the gates he met Di.

He had only spoken to her once or twice since he heard of her engagement, it had not been mentioned between them. She looked radiantly happy. Jim felt a sudden pang of jealousy, he loved her deeply, why should he not try and win her back? She had been fond of him, they had always been good friends.

Since her engagement Di had been particularly soft-hearted where Jim was concerned. She thought of her own great happiness and wondered how she would have felt had Dick made his choice elsewhere. She smiled kindly at him, sympathy in her eyes—he looked into her face and hoped. Perhaps she had heard something about Dick Douglas, her father might have urged her to reconsider, it was no light thing for her to ally herself with one of that family. Had he but known how hopeless his case was he might have rested satisfied, if not contented, but he was in the dark.

There was no one about, the place for the moment seemed deserted.

He came close to her, his face showing his agitation.

"Is it true you are engaged to Mr Douglas?" he asked.

"Yes, Jim, are you not glad of my good fortune?" She would put it to him in that way.

"Any good fortune that may befall you I am glad of, but is this good fortune?" he asked.

"Of course it is," said Di, "I could not have better."

"They are a strange family," said Jim.

"You ought to know he is one of the best of men," said Di.

44 The Chance of a Lifetime

"To a man, yes," said Jim.

"And to a woman," she said quickly.

"I don't know, it may not be so?"

"Jim, I expected you to act differently, to congratulate me," she said

"How can I do that when I lose the girl I love, see her claimed by another? I have loved you a very long time, I shall love you always," said Jim, pathos in his voice. "Is it a light thing to lose the one you love best of all?"

"No," said Di, "it is not, Jim, I am very sorry, very sorry indeed."

"You are?" he asked quickly.

"Yes"

"Do you trust him?" asked Jim

"Mr Douglas?"

"Yes."

She smiled confidently as she said,

"Of course I do"

"Have you noticed anything?" asked Jim

"No, what do you mean?"

"I saw Mr Douglas and Mrs Edgar going up to town as I came past the station"

"Well!" exclaimed Di, surprised

"They are often in town at the same time"

"Still Di did not see the drift of his meaning

"My aunt goes to buy for the house," she said

"But they nearly always go the same day, and return the same day, it is not right now he is engaged to you, people will talk"

"How can you be so absurd!" said Di "My aunt, and Dick," she laughed at the mere idea

"She is a very handsome woman," said Jim.

"If you say another word about it I will not speak to you again," said Di sharply

"I only mentioned what I heard; I don't attach much importance to it, but he ought to be careful now he has you," said Jim.

"Never mention this to me again," said Di, emphatically

When Mrs Edgar returned from London that night Di said in indifferent tones,

"Had you any company going or returning?"

"The best of company," said Mrs Edgar, "guess."

"Mr Robson," said Di.

"No indeed," said Mrs Edgar.

"Steve Bank"

"No."

"Give it up."

"Mr Douglas Do you know, Di, he talked about you nearly all the time Did your ears burn?"

"No, at least I don't remember Dick often travels with you?"

"Yes, I always like his company, he is amusing, also instructive, and attentive—because I am your aunt," said Miss Edgar, smiling

Di said nothing more, but Jim's hint was not forgotten, although she dismissed it from her mind as ridiculous

Next day Clinch met Jim Ames in the street and asked him in to Acacia Villa to have a glass of wine The jockey had never had much to do with Clinch, had not ridden any of his horses

Clinch broached the subject of Di's engagement to Dick and said, "I thought you were first favourite there"

"I fancied I had a chance," said Jim, "but I got done"

"A bit mean of Douglas to steal your girl, he might have looked elsewhere," said Clinch

"I wish he had"

"Why not pay him out?" said Clinch.

"I'm not likely to have a chance"

"Plenty if you'll only take them, I know one good one"

"Do you?"

"Yes, I suppose you'll be engaged to ride Trivic in the Woodcote Cup?"

"Yes"

"Throw him over at the last moment," said Clinch

"I'd never do a nasty thing like that," said Jim

"You have no occasion to be particular about him, he's robbed you of your girl"

"He'd easily find another jockey for her," said Jim

"But not one who knows the mare as well as you"

"Perhaps not"

"She'd run a better race for you than anyone?"

"I think so"

"Look here," said Clinch, with a show of confidence, "I stand to win a lot of money over the Broker; if he wins I'll treat you liberally"

"What do you call liberally?" asked Jim

"A couple of hundred to nothing," said Clinch

"I shall not do anything in that line," said Jim "I've always gone straight"

"I don't ask you to do anything wrong," said Clinch, "I am showing you how to get even with Douglas"

"It will have to be in some other way," said Jim.

As he walked home he thought over Captain Clinch's suggestions, like Di he tried to dismiss what he had heard from his mind but the words "I am showing you how to get even with Douglas," rang in his ears

46 The Chance of a Lifetime

CHAPTER XI

A CURIOUS WAGER

BOB LOVETT and Betty Douglas were married quietly, and after a tour in the South of England went to Cottesstone.

Lord Lovett behaved well on their arrival—he kissed Betty, and said he was delighted his son had chosen her. For a few weeks everything went well, but towards the end of that time Bob and his father had disputes, chiefly about money matters.

Betty's advice was "Don't worry him," but Bob did not always act upon it. His father promised him an allowance of three thousand a year, but neglected to pay regularly. Bob remonstrated, and Lord Lovett raged at his ingratitude.

At last Betty took matters into her own hands. She spoke to Lord Lovett, said she could do with less money if he found it inconvenient to allow them so much.

"I never said it was inconvenient," said Lord Lovett.

"Bob complained of being short, so I took it for granted," she said.

"I promised him three thousand a year and he shall have it," said Lord Lovett, "but I will not be bothered over it, I hate worry."

In due course Bob received his cheque and praised Betty for her tact.

Since the sale Dick Douglas had lived quietly at Netherby, riding over most days to see D. He was very fond of her and wished his marriage was not to be delayed. Bob was often at Netherby, he had, at Betty's instigation, offered to go halves with Dick in his horses if he would buy a couple more to lead Trixie in her Cup work.

"Mat has nothing good enough," said Bob, "and as you've got to beat the Broker no mistake must be made."

"Leave it all to Mat, he's not likely to make mistakes," said Dick.

As the days went rapidly by, Captain Clinch became more anxious to carry out his scheme. Jim Ames showed no sign of doing as he wished, so there was nothing for it but to try and secure the mare before the date of the Woodcote fixture. This was more difficult than Clinch anticipated, it had been, up to now, impossible to get any knowledge of the premises.

Mat Lawson's horse and stables were not easy of access to strangers.

At last Clinch determined to take a step which might give him what he required. Although not on friendly terms with Dick Douglas and knowing very little of Mat Lawson there was no reason why he should not call and ask to look over the stables. This was often done, and Mat would hardly like to refuse his request.

Clinch had been prowling round the premises, so had Ben Blower, and they discovered it would be useless to attempt to obtain possession of Trixie unless they had a duplicate key of the gate. Ben Blower was an expert in duplicating keys, the difficulty was how to get at it. Although there was ample time before the races, Captain Clinch wished to obtain a duplicate so that no time need be lost later on.

With this end in view, he, in company with Ben Blower and Ash, watched each morning for a favourable time to pay a visit to Mat's stables.

"Far better go there when he's out," said Ben. "The head lad will show us round."

He met Clinch on the heath one morning and said that Mat Lawson had gone away by train.

"Then we had better try it on at once," said Clinch, and fixed a time.

Accompanied by Ben Blower and Ash he went to Mat Lawson's. Entering the yard they found Jim Ames there, he was surprised to see them, and his suspicions were aroused at once, after what Clinch had said to him.

"Good afternoon, Jim, is Mr Lawson in?" asked Clinch.

"No."

"That's a pity, I wanted to ask a favour of him, but you'll do."

"What is it?"

"I want to have a look round. I'm thinking of making some alterations for Lacey at his place and thought I might get a wrinkle that would be useful."

Jim looked at Blower and Ash. Clinch said,

"They can wait here until we return."

"I see no harm in it," said Jim, at the same time he determined not to allow him to enter Trixie's box.

Clinch looked at Blower significantly as he walked away with Jim Ames.

"Now's our time," said Ben, when they were out of sight.

The key was in the gate on the inside. Ash pulled it out and handed it to Ben who had a box in his hand containing some soft yellow substance. He placed the key flat on the smooth surface, shut the lid, and put it in his pocket where he kept it for a few minutes. Looking cautiously round he opened the lid again, took the key out, saw there was a correct impression, and handed it to Ash who put it in the lock again.

"It's no good stopping here," said Ben, "we have all we require; he'll think we've got what's wanted and cleared out."

Ash had no desire to remain, so they left.

When Clinch came back with Jim he looked round, then said, "Tired of waiting, I suppose," and wondered if they had taken an impression of the key.

48 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Which is Trixie's box?" asked Clinch.

"This," said Jim, pointing to the one opposite the entrance to Mat's cottage

"An awkward place to get at without being seen," thought Clinch.

"May I have a look at her?" he asked

"The box is locked and I have not the key, it is in the house"

"Can't you get it?"

"I am not going to ask for it, Mat would not like anyone to see the mare during his absence"

"Where's the harm in it?" asked Clinch

"It's against the rules"

"Mat would show her to me if he were here," said Clinch

As they were talking Mat Lawson came into the yard and was soon after followed by Dick Douglas, Bob and his wife, and Joe Robson. They were much surprised at finding Clinch with Jim Anies

"I came to look at your stables," said Clinch, and explained the reason

"You are quite welcome to take any hints," said Mat

"I asked Jim to show me Trixie but he said this could not be done in your absence"

"Quite right, that is so," said Mat

"Will you let me look at her?" asked Clinch

"Mr Douglas being present you had better ask him," said Mat

Di came out of the house and was talking to Dick. Mrs Edgar, who accompanied her, spoke to Joe Robson

"Shall I let him see her?" said Dick to Di

"I think I should, it might be the means of promoting a better feeling between you," she answered

"Perhaps Mat will have her brought out, then we can all see her," said Dick

"Thanks," said Clinch, "I have never had a good look at her since the sale"

Mat gave orders to the head lad and Trixie was brought out.

"She's a beauty, a real gem," said Joe Robson

"Looks grand," said Bob

Clinch eyed the mare critically, he was near the box and went inside. "So this is where she is housed, nice and comfortable, not much fear of anyone getting in here without your permission," he said, as he examined the lock, which could be opened by pulling back the handle on the inside, but outside there was merely the key hole.

Clinch took everything in at a glance, also the movable glass ventilator above the upper part of the door

"There's not much fear of anyone prowling around here at

night, when the big gate is locked," said Mat "At the same time there's nothing like being secure, and Trixie is safely housed."

"That's the mare that is going to beat the Broker on Cup day," said Joe.

Captain Clinch smiled, as he looked round, and said, "No doubt you all think so."

"I have an idea she'll win easily," said Bob.

"I hope so," said Di.

Mat said she had an excellent chance.

"What do you think, Mr. Douglas?" asked Clinch.

"I fancy she will win."

"That is why you were so anxious to secure her at the sale, it was well stage managed, her disappearance—not many auctioneers would have allowed it."

"I suppose you really intended buying her?" said Dick.

"Of course I did, with the Broker and your mare in my stable the result would have been beyond doubt, as it is I think the Broker will win."

"I don't," said Dick. "So certain am I that this is the chance of a lifetime, that I invite you all to Netherby Hall to drink my health, and the mare's, out of the Gold Cup, the night after the race."

"Counting your chickens before they are hatched," said Joe Robson.

"There's many a slip, twixt the cup and the lip," said Clinch.

Dick was on his mettle, he would have no doubts cast on the mare's ability to win.

"I am willing to wager she wins the Woodcote Cup and that we drink out of it at Netherby the night after," said Dick.

"How much for?" asked Clinch.

"Any reasonable amount," said Dick.

"Five thousand?" said Clinch. They all looked at Dick, it was a large amount and he had very little money, at least in hard cash.

"Yes, five thousand if you like," said Dick.

"I'll take that," said Clinch taking out his book. "Let me see, we had better be exact, it is rather a curious wager. Will you write it down, Robson?"

Joe prepared to do so.

"Mr. Douglas bets me five thousand pounds level that Trixie wins the Woodcote Cup, and that we all drink out of the gold cup the next night at Netherby Hall," said Clinch. "I think that is the wager."

"It's curious," said Joe, "but of course if Trixie wins there'll be no difficulty about the other part."

"None at all," said Dick, "I merely want to secure your presence at Netherby to participate in my victory."

"You've not won yet," said Clinch with a curious smile.

CHAPTER XII

JOE ROBSON CONSULTED

TRIXIE'S trial took place on the heath when Mat Lawson had the good fortune to secure the loan of a couple of genuine performers to test her merits. She came out of the ordeal with flying colours and Dick Douglas became more enthusiastic than ever about her chance.

Since Clinch's visit to the stables Mrs Edgar had puzzled her mind as to his reason for calling. It was not to trap Dick into a wager, that was made on the spur of the moment, nor was it, as he had stated, because Larc wished to make improvements on his stables—she had found out that no such alterations were contemplated. There was some roguery afoot, she was sure, but what was it? That Clinch would make a daring attempt to take Trixie away never entered her head, it was too improbable. She knew him to be capable of almost any crime and this made her anxious.

From Joe Robson she learned that Clinch stood to win a large sum on the Broker, the bookmaker told her he thought some of them would have to look sharp after their money if the horse lost. Then there was the five thousand wager with Dick, he would strain every nerve to win it, would have no scruple in adopting any underhand method to secure his end. She wondered what he said to Jim Ames during the time they were together. She guessed Jim was much cut up over Di's engagement, that he must regard Dick Douglas in the light of a supplanter. Jim had always been honest, ridden straight, and had a good name in the profession. She could not consult Mat, explain her fears to him, because if Clinch heard of it, he would bring the most terrible charges against her. His threat hung over her, blighting her life, she smiled and appeared cheerful, but was sad at heart. She wished she had not entered into the compact, it would have been better to expose him when they met at Netherby, trusting to her innocence to clear her name. She knew how the innocent suffer because she had experienced it. To be in the power of such a man was unbearable, yet she dare not face a scandal. So far Clinch had made no use of his power, but he would if it served his purpose. He avoided her, for which she was thankful, but how long would it last?

She worked upon her fears until she became nervous. The keen eyes of Joe Robson detected it, he was anxious about her. At the sale he noticed her frightened look in Clinch's direction, and became convinced they had met before. He trusted her entirely; Clinch he regarded as an unprincipled man. If he could only help her how glad he would be. With some such intention in his mind he went down to Woodcote.

Mat was always glad to see him and have a chat; Joe had worked some clever commissions for the stable. It was not easy to catch Mrs Edgar alone, she avoided him, or he thought so, but he waited his opportunity, and Di came to his assistance.

"Do you wish to see my aunt alone?" asked Di, who noticed his manoeuvres.

"That's what I have been trying to do ever since I came down," said Joe ruefully.

"Come with me," said Di, and he followed her.

"There she is, at the bottom of the garden, now's your chance."

"I'll take it," said Joe, strolling away.

"What a good fellow he is," thought Di, "and how fond of her."

The garden was at the rear of the house, a quiet spot. Mrs Edgar saw him coming, there was no way of avoiding him, nor did she wish to do so at that moment.

Joe Robson had a sturdy manner that implanted confidence, and she felt safe in his company—he seemed to shield her.

His bashfulness made her smile: it was a compliment to her womanhood. He hardly knew how to begin, he was not a good hand at fencing, he took things with a rush.

"Mrs Edgar, what is the matter with you?" he blurted out, "you have not been yourself for some time, you are nervous."

"What makes you think so?"

"Your manner, your face—don't think me impertinent, I have watched you, been anxious about you."

This solicitude was comforting, but she dared not confide in him. How she wished it were possible, but there was the shadow of Clinch in the background.

"May I say something?" asked Joe.

"You generally do."

"I mean something that I have thought might concern you, be the cause of your nervousness," he said.

"I am not nervous, at least not more than usual," she remonstrated.

He shook his head, he did not accept the denial.

"Has Clinch anything to do with it?" he asked.

He saw her start, and thought unutterable things about the man.

She looked at him in a half-frightened way as she denied it.

"Pardon my asking," he said, "but I should be sorry for anyone, man or woman, who was under his thumb."

"You do not insinuate I am in that unfortunate position?" she asked.

"No, of course not, it's my stupid way of putting things. You know I am your friend, that you can trust me?"

"Oh yes, I am sure of it"

"If at any time you wish to tell me anything, ask my help, will you?"

"Yes."

"That's right. I can keep my tongue still"

She was on the point of telling him her fears about Clinch but hesitated—after all there might be nothing in it, he might have no evil design against Trixie or Jim Ames. Perhaps she might mention her fears about Jim, he might reassure her.

"What do you think of Jim Ames?" she asked.

"I like him, he's straight"

"You know he was very much in love with Di, is so still," she said

"I am not surprised, but I did not know"

"Do you think he would do Mr Douglas a bad turn?" she asked

"Because he has won Di?"

"Yes"

Joe thought for a moment, then said,

"It might influence him"

"So much depends on Trixie winning the Cup that I am anxious, that is the reason I mentioned it"

"I do not think anyone can get at Jim," said Joe

"Not even if he wished to be revenged on Dick?"

"No, he would not do it in that way"

"I am very glad to hear you say so"

They walked along the path, at the turn Joe stopped

"Mrs Edgar," he said, "you know how I admire and esteem you, how I love you. I am a plain blunt man, but I would make you a good husband, will you have me?"

Placing her hand on his arm she said,

"Do not ask me for an answer, I cannot marry again, at least not yet"

"But if you could would you have me?" he asked.

"I think so, mind I am not quite sure"

"Why cannot you marry?"

"That is my secret for the present, some day you may know it. Is your faith in me very great?"

"It is"

"Would you believe in me if you heard anything compromising, any scandal about me?"

He laughed as he said, "I am not likely to be tested in that way, under any circumstances I would implicitly trust you"

She thanked him and he said, "You'll think over what I have said, if you can see your way to make me happy give me a chance."

"I'll consider it," she said, smiling.

Joe Robson returned to town elated, he had never got so far with her before, he considered he had a very fair chance.

At the Atlas Club he met Clinch

"Been down to Woodcote lately?" asked the Captain.

"Just returned from there"

"See the mare?"

"No."

"The Broker won his trial," said Clinch.

"So I heard"

"And he'll win the Cup if he runs up to it."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Joe

"I believe Dick Douglas says it's the chance of a lifetime," said Clinch

"And so it is, I never was more confident of anything"

"Will you back the mare against my horse?"

"I have done so"

"But will you do it again?"

"Yes, how much?"

"A thousand level"

"That the Broker beats Trixie?"

"Yes"

"I'll accept that," said Joe, wondering if he would be paid if he won

The Woodcote Cup seldom caused much speculation before the day of the race, but, on this occasion, it was an exception, for Captain Clinch had backed his horse heavily to beat the mare.

Joe Robson wondered what made him so certain of winning, it was strange he did not wait for a handicap where the odds would be liberal. The more he thought about it the stranger it became unless Clinch had something up his sleeve. Had he got at Jim Ames? Mrs Edgar seemed to think Jim was wavering, but Joe did not doubt him, he had every faith in the jockey.

If it was not Jim what was it? Clinch was not likely to get at the mare, that was too risky.

He spoke to two or three friends about Clinch and his wagers, asking what they thought. The general opinion appeared to be that Clinch had a "down" on Dick Douglas for spiriting the mare away at the sale

"He means making him pay heavily if he can," said one.

"But he is not the man to throw a large sum of money away and it seems to me that's what he is doing," said Joe.

"Perhaps he really thinks the Broker is better than Trixie?"

"Well he is not. Mat Lawson is confident the mare will win," said Joe

When Clinch arrived at his rooms he found Ben Blower waiting for him.

54 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Anything fresh?" asked Clinch

"Yes, let's go inside."

They entered the room and Ben said,

"I've seen Ash to-day"

"Well?"

"He thinks he's got hold of Jim Ames—he and Douglas had a few words about the girl and Jim resented his high handed manner"

"Good," said Clinch "but it will not be so safe as kidnapping Trixie"

"You mean tying that?"

"Yes"

"When?"

"The end of the week. We shall want Ash, he's small and light, he'll be useful to chop in the door and open the door," said Clinch

CHAPTER XIII

TRAP LID

SHORTLY after midnight Clinch slipped quietly out of Acacia Villa and walked rapidly towards the heath. He took a roundabout way, avoiding the main thoroughfare, he had no wish to be seen. His movements were cautious, but there was no one about, and when he reached the heath he stood listening, hearing no sound but the occasional bark of a dog in the stillness of the night.

He struck off in the direction of Mat Lawson's. A clump of bushes stood about a mile from the trainer's house, the only break in the landscape. By the faint light of the rising moon he distinguished the outline and went towards it. He gave a low whistle and there was an answering sound.

"They're there," he thought, "we have no time to lose"

A head appeared out of the clump, it was Ben Blower, crouching beside him was Abel Ash, who already repented being in such a situation.

"You, Captain?" asked Blower.

"Yes, come along, hurry up, have you got the key?"

"Yes"

"I don't half like this job," said Abel, as they walked rapidly along.

"You've got to go through with it whether you like it or not," said Clinch.

"Can't I go back?"

"No."

"What's to hinder me?"

"If you back down I'll make it hot for you," said Clinch.

"Don't rile him," whispered Ben, "it's not safe, you don't know him as well as I do."

Abel slouched along, unwillingly, he was afraid of Clinch, who knew too much about him.

They went round to the right, approaching the trainer's house under cover of the high wall.

Clinch held up his hand and they stopped.

"What is it?" asked Ben.

"I thought I heard someone moving about on the other side," said Clinch.

"Not likely at this time," said Ben.

"Anyhow we'll make sure, come here, Abel."

The jockey approached, and Clinch told Ben to bend down, then he lifted Ash on to his back.

"Now raise yourself slowly and he can stand on your shoulders," said Clinch.

The jockey did so and could just see over the wall, he looked carefully round the yard.

"There's no one about," he whispered as he slipped down. They walked rapidly to the entrance gates.

Ben Blower had the key ready and humbled with the lock.

"Won't it fit?" asked Clinch impatiently.

Ben pushed it half way in when it stuck.

"I have another key," he said, "I made a couple, sometimes they are not quite exact."

"Pull it out," said Clinch, angry at the delay.

This was not so easily done, the key was jammed in the lock, as Ben, with an extra tug, pulled it out, the gates rattled.

"Less noise, you fool," said Clinch angrily.

The other key fitted, the lock shot back. Clinch opened the gate sufficiently wide for them to pass through, and Ben put the key in on the inside.

"What's that for?" asked Clinch.

"I forgot," said Ben, "shall I take it out again? Force of habit you know."

"Never mind, leave it now," said Clinch.

They stole across to Tuxie's box, Ben Blower going first.

Clinch tapped him on the shoulder, "Go and listen at the door," he said, pointing to the cottage.

"Not a sound," said Ben coming back.

"Now then," said Clinch to Ash, "you're got to be heaved up and get through that fanlight at the top, then you can drop down and slip back the lock—speak to the mare so that you'll not startle her."

"I'm not going in that way," said Ash. "Supposing the lock won't shoot I shall be trapped."

"It will shoot," said Clinch, "I've seen it."

56 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Did you try it?"

"No, but I'm certain of it."

"Get up," said Ben, "when he's riled he's dangerous."

Clinch hoisted Abel up, the jockey pushed back the light and squeezed through.

"Quiet, Trixie, quiet," he said, as the mare moved from side to side.

He then dropped lightly on to the straw. Trixie started again, Abel put his hand on her and spoke soothingly, then pulled back the lock and pushed the top part of the door open. Clinch unfastened the lower half and they went inside. At this moment the moon began to show over the top of the house, shining on the box.

Mrs. Edgar retired early, she had a slight headache. Dick Douglas was sleeping there for the night, as there was some important work to be done in the morning. It was some time before she went to sleep, when she did so dreams troubled her and she was restless. She awoke with a start, wondering what time it was. Her watch stood on a small table at her bedside, she struck a match and lit the candle.

"Half-past one," she said. "I did not think I had slept so long."

The men in the box were so intent upon getting the mare ready they did not see the reflection on the blind.

She blew it out, then fancied she heard a peculiar sound in the yard. She listened intently, certainly there was someone about. She was sure of it. At once she was on the alert, her fears were aroused—was anyone trying to get into Trixie's box? During the past few days she had worked herself into such a state that she was firmly convinced something would happen to the mare during the week. Another sound, it was a horse moving, she had no doubt about it.

Slipping quietly out of bed she went to the window and pulled the blind on one side, the moon was now over the top of the house, the light shone full on the box.

She almost cried out when she saw the door open, restraining herself with an effort.

Someone had opened it and was inside with the mare; her thoughts at once flew to Clinch, was he there?

Not a moment must be lost, should she rouse the household? Better not, if it was Clinch. She could deal with him alone at an advantage.

Slipping on her dressing gown and slippers she stole quickly and silently downstairs, let herself out at the back door, and hurried round the corner of the house.

As she passed the gate she saw the key on the inside and turned it, taking it out. She was almost at the door of the

box when Clinch came out leading Tixie. When he saw Mrs Edgar he was so startled he could not speak for a moment.

Ben Blower caught sight of her and followed by Ash made a bolt for the gate only to find it locked and the key gone.

Abel Ash trembled in every limb as he said in shaking voice, "We're caught, it means imprisonment."

"Shut up," said Ben. "If it's Mrs Edgar the captain will find a way out of the mess, I believe he has some hold upon her."

"What are you doing here with the mare?" asked Mrs Edgar. Now she was face to face with Clinch she was not afraid, something told her before she went downstairs that it was he.

"I'm going to hide her, follow Douglas's example," he said.

"You will not take her from here," she said firmly.

"I shall, stand back. Open the gate," he said to Ben, who had come back to him, leaving Abel Ash propped against the wall in a half-fainting condition.

"The key's gone, it's locked," he said.

The captain cursed his stupidity for putting it in on the inside.

"You have the key?" he said to Mrs Edgar.

"I have."

"Give it to me."

"I will not."

"You must."

"No," she said, backing away from him.

"Hold the mare," said Clinch to Ben. When his hands were free he approached her. She saw his intention and went quickly to the door of the cottage, her hand gripped the knocker.

"Touch me and I will rouse them," she said.

"You dare not."

"I dare," she said, and he saw she meant it.

"You shall pay for this," he said.

"Put the mare back," said Mrs Edgar firmly, but she was much agitated.

"Better do as she asks, Captain," said Ben Blower, "then she may let us go and not 'preach'."

Clinch looked at her, the situation was perilous, someone inside the cottage might hear them.

"If I put the mare back, will you open the gate, let us go, and say nothing about it?" said Clinch.

"Yes."

"If you give me away you know what to expect."

"I will say nothing."

Clinch led the mare into her box, when he came out he was about to shut the door when she heard someone moving inside.

"They are coming," she said, leaving the door and going to the gate, "be quick you have not a moment to lose."

She unlocked the gate, Ben Blower and Abel slipped through and ran as hard as they could across the heath. As Clinch went out he said to her,

"Mind not a word or I'll do for you"

"Go," she said "I have promised," and he passed out; she locked the gate and put the key in her dressing gown pocket. Had Trixie come to any harm, was her first thought. She entered the box and spoke to the mare. Trixie recognised her voice, and as she went up to her greeted her with an affectionate rub of her velvety nose. She patted the mare and said,

"I was only just in time, in a few minutes you would have been away and whatever would have become of you?"

She placed the head stall on her and saw that all was right. If she could slip back into the house again without being seen all would be well. Had she time? She had heard a movement inside, was someone coming out. She listened, but heard nothing. A final look at the mare standing in the moonlight streaming in convinced her Trixie had not been harmed. She must fasten the door again and go to her room as quickly as possible. Was that the front door she heard opened? It sounded like it, if so it was done quietly.

She went to the door of the box, and as she stepped out met Dick Douglas, who stared at her in amazement, hardly crediting the evidence of his senses.

CHAPTER XIV

A COMPROMISING SITUATION

DICK DOUGLAS was a light sleeper, he awoke suddenly, fancying he heard voices—who was about at this hour? He listened, surely he was mistaken, then he heard the sound again, someone was talking outside. Another sound, this time, he was almost certain it was a horse's hoof on the hard ground. He was alert at once, out of bed and slipped on his trousers and coat, then cautiously stole downstairs. The front door was locked and bolted, he undid it quietly and stepped out; a glance across the yard showed him Trixie's box had been entered. There could only be but one meaning to this, someone had been at the mare. As he went across the yard Mrs Edgar came out of the box.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I heard sounds outside so I crept down to see if Trixie was safe," she said.

How she hated herself for deceiving him, but there was no help for it, she had let Clinch go—taken another false step.

"Did you see anyone about?" he asked.

"No," she said in a low voice.

"I fancied I heard voices, then I thought I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, I must have been mistaken," he said.

She passed over this remark, no doubt he had heard the murmur of their voices.

"It was very plucky of you to come down like this," he said.

"I was so anxious about the mare."

"Why did you not call someone?"

"There was no time. Had I delayed some damage might have been done."

"By jove there are not many women would have acted as you have done," he said admiringly.

"I confess I feel nervous now the excitement is over," she said smiling.

"I don't wonder at it. Had you not better go indoors while I look at Trixie?"

"I will come in the box with you," she said.

Dick entered the box and she followed him—the lower half of the door swung to behind them.

It was hardly likely, such an alert man as Mat Lawson would sleep soundly while this was happening just outside his house. He awoke quickly hearing curious noises, then someone go quietly downstairs and open the door. His room was next to Di's and she heard him moving about, putting her head out at the door, she asked what was the matter.

"Something wrong outside," said Mat, "Mr Douglas must have gone down. I'll call Robson and Ames." The bookmaker and the jockey were at the cottage, they had come with Dick Douglas the evening before.

"It's an attempt to nobble the mare," said Joe, and thought, "Cinch is at the bottom of it."

Mat was out first, Di soon after him.

"The top part of the door is open," said Di. "I believe there is someone inside, listen."

Dick and Mrs Edgar were just coming out, having found Trixie all right.

"It was courageous of you to run the risk," said Dick, loud enough for Di and Mat to hear.

"It's Dick," said Di, "I wonder who is with him."

The door of the box was pushed open and they came out. Mrs Edgar looked pale and agitated, the sensations had been too much for her; Dick bent towards her as he spoke.

As soon as Mrs Edgar saw Di she gave a little cry of alarm, the look in her niece's face told her she misunderstood the situation. It flashed across Mrs Edgar's mind that she was in a compromising position; she turned pale as she thought how little explanation she could give.

60 The Chance of a Lifetime

Di took her father by the arm, "Aunt here, in the box, alone with Dick, this is too bad."

Mat looked sternly at his sister and Dick Douglas. "Perhaps you will be good enough to explain this," he said coldly.

Dick began to grasp the situation, see what was in their minds, and the gross suspicion and injustice angered him. Mrs. Edgar had bravely come down alone to see that Trixie was all right, and they suspected her of what? Dick resembled all the Douglas's in his anger, he said bitter things which sometimes he repented.

"I see nothing to explain," he said haughtily, looking at Mat.

"There is a great deal to explain," said Mat, turning to his sister. "What are you doing here, in that box, at this hour, alone with Mr. Douglas, in that costume?"

"Yes, what are you doing here?" said Di, without looking at Dick.

Jim Ames and Joe Robson were in the yard, when Di saw the jockey she remembered what he had said about her aunt and Dick going up to London together.

Mrs. Edgar gave an appealing look to Joe who went nearer to her—now was his chance to prove what he had said to her in the garden, his presence seemed to give her confidence.

"I thought I heard a noise outside and came down to see if the mare was safe," she said.

"Alone?" said Mat incredulously.

"Yes, quite alone."

"Why did you not rouse me?"

"Because I did not wish to disturb you until I had ascertained if there was anything wrong."

"Did you see anyone?"

She hesitated. Joe Robson watched her closely.

"No," she said falteringly. Again Clinch stood in the way of her clearing herself. Joe Robson thought:

"I believe she did see someone. Was it Clinch, and if so why did she let him go? Why does she not say he was here, she must be afraid of him—well, I'll stand by her."

"No one—except Mr. Douglas," said Mat sarcastically. "Alone in that box with him at such an hour—was it an assignation?"

"You are going too far," said Dick angrily. "Mrs. Edgar acted bravely in coming out alone. I heard something outside and went downstairs. I saw the door of Trixie's box open; she was inside looking to see if the mare was all right. I said she had better go indoors, but she remained with me until I had passed my hand over the mare. That is all, your suspicions are base and unfounded, scandalous."

The Chance of a Lifetime 61

By this time Di was in tears, and Mrs Edgar could stand it no longer. Going to her, she said,

"Di, Di, after all these years do you believe I would be guilty of such a thing? It is too horrible."

"I don't know what to think, I am miserable," said Di sobbing, and burying her head on her father's shoulder.

"Di, you cannot believe this?" said Dick

She would not look at him, and Mat sternly ordered him to stand back.

"You are doing us a greivous wrong," said Dick "I disdain to offer any further explanation I thank your sister for what she has done"

Mrs Edgar was painfully agitated by this scene, and the unjust suspicions of her brother and Di

"Have you nothing more to say?" asked Mat

Dick disdained answering, but his sister said,

"Mat, you cannot think so badly of me as this, surely you believe what I have said"

"The facts are strong against you," he said "You have given no satisfactory explanation, except this cock and bull story about hearing a noise and going down to see if the mare was safe It is a strange thing Mr Douglas should be of the same mind at the same time Come, Di, we will go inside and leave them, this is no place for you, I am sorry my sister should so far forget herself as to bring sorrow upon you, nay worse, disgrace"

"Stop, mind what you say," said Dick, who was now thoroughly roused, "or you may repent when it is too late"

"I have weighed my words," said Mat "I told you when I gave my daughter to you that the Douglass's had been a dare-devil lot, you are no better than the rest"

Di still sobbed bitterly and this increased, rather than diminished, Dick's anger

"Do you believe this, Di?" he asked "Do you believe this scandalous insinuation?"

"My daughter has faith in my judgment," said Mat "I am sorry, very sorry, Mr Richard, but all must be at an end between you, the engagement is broken off" His voice faltered towards the end.

"Oh, father," said Di piteously—she was losing Dick, what would life be worth without him?

"I will not accept that from you, I wait to hear what Di has to say," said Dick.

"Tell him you will do as I wish," said Mat

"I cannot believe in faith and honour again," sobbed Di,

"Yes, father, I will do as you desire, it is better so."

"Very well," said Dick, still angry. "Be it so, but don't

forget the day will come when you will both be sorry and ashamed for what you have done. My conscience is clear, so is Miss Edgar's, and we have nothing to fear. You suffer now, Di, but you will suffer more when you find out how utterly wrong you have been. I thought you loved and trusted me, but I was mistaken, at the first suspicion you go against me, throw me over. Well, let it be, I still love you, I shall always love you, and when you come to me repentant I will forgive you."

"We will go inside," said Mat, "come, Di," and he led her, still crying bitterly, into the house.

Mat returned alone. Speaking to his sister he said,

"You must find another home as soon as you can, it will be impossible for you to remain here."

She made no answer, and Joe Robson, stepping up to Mat, said,

"You are wrong for once in your life, Mat. I'll pledge my honour your sister is innocent. I have faith in her. I'll marry her to-morrow if she'll have me. Anyhow she shan't lack for a house, my sister will look after her."

"You're one of the right sort," said Dick, "shake hands," and he gave the bookmaker a hearty grasp.

Mat Lawson wondered if he had made a mistake. Joe Robson was seldom wrong, in this instance he must be, the facts were dead against him. Without answering he went slowly into the house.

Mrs Edgar followed, Joe Robson and Jim Ames went in after her, and Dick Douglas remained alone in the yard.

CHAPTER XV

REFLECTIONS

"WHAT a change has come over my life since last night," thought Dick, as he stood looking at the cottage, then up to the window of Di's room. He was still angry at the turn things had taken, at the false construction Mat placed on the situation. He blamed Mat more than Di—had she been left to herself she would probably have believed what they told her. He loved her and was sorry, very sorry, to lose her. Would he lose her? He thought not. She would come to believe in him in time and all would be well.

He felt no desire to enter the cottage, it might be a long time before he did so. No doubt Mat would wish him to remove his horses. What about Trixie? It would ruin her chance for the Cup to change stables at the last moment? Mat would not like to part with her, probably he would suggest the horses remained in his charge until after the Woodcote Meeting.

The Chance of a Lifetime . 63

He would be sorry to part with Mat; they had always been on excellent terms, and the trainer had known him from a child, had taught him to ride, given him his first mount on his old cob That was many years ago, but the time came vividly back as he stood there thinking.

He remembered Mat lifting him up in his arms and placing him in the saddle, then leading the cob out at the gates on to the Heath. Di was not born then, it was soon after Mat's second marriage. How many times had he left Netherby Hall secretly, to walk over and see Mat? He could not reckon the number, but on an average he disappeared mysteriously two or three times a week and the groom always knew where to find him.

Mat had been a father to him almost, taking the place of his real father, who was seldom at home and neglected the boy sadly. When he got into trouble Mat stood by him through thick and thin, shielded him in every way, had shown how he loved the lad. He remembered when Di was born, and how Mat brought her to him in his arms and he had kissed her little pink face and thought how soft and velvety it was. Memories flooded his mind, nothing seemed to be left out, and in his recollections of the past it seemed there were always Mat and Di. He had romped and played with her, chased her round the stables in and out of the boxes, tumbled her over in the hay barn, hunted for birds' nests with her, helped her to climb trees, placed her in all kinds of well nigh impossible positions on the branches, caught her in his arms as she slipped down. Many a wild gallop they had across the heath, her hair streaming behind her, hatless, full of happy childhood, free from care and trouble. Mat took them to a pantomime in London, how they all laughed and screamed with delight at the antics of two men combined as one horse. He recollected that Di fell asleep in the train as they returned home. She leaned against him, her head rested on his shoulder, her face looked so sweet that he softly kissed her. The memory of that kiss lingered still, it must have been then he first commenced to love her. She went away to school, soon after her return he found out she was a woman. The rest followed, she was his, and now—they were parted.

Was she thinking about him in her room? He looked at the window, there was no sign, she had not even cared to see if he had gone in.

He was wrong, Di had been watching him, with tearful eyes, ever since she entered her room. She too recalled memories of the past, very similar to his, as she saw him standing alone, disconsolate. She loved him, would always love him. They were parted, but something told her it was only for a time. She wondered if she had done right in breaking off the engagement.

—might not her father have judged too hastily? Her aunt had always been kind to her, helped her to meet Dick, shown every sign of joy at her engagement. Could she be guilty of trying to take Dick from her? Was there anything improper in her conduct, might it not be true that she had acted as she stated? Di was already in a forgiving mood, she felt inclined to open the window and tell Dick she had not lost faith in him, that he was all in all to her.

Dick went to Trixie's box and opened the upper half. The mare was loose and came to him, putting her head out. Dick stroked her nose softly and said, "You have not lost faith in me, Trixie, old girl. You are going to win the Cup. I have lost Di for a time, but I do not think it will be for long. you sympathise with me, do you not?"

Trixie pushed her nose against his cheek.

"That's right, I knew you did. A huge mess we got into on your account, you must make amends for it by winning easily. We were so anxious about you, that was the cause of the trouble. It's not your fault, old girl, although you are the cause. Good night, or rather good morning, it won't be long before you are out at exercise."

He pushed her gently back and fastened the door.

"I'll go and sit down for an hour in Mat's room," he said to himself, "I wonder what he'll say about the horses, the sooner it's all over the better."

He stood a moment in the shadow of the porch beneath Di's window, he did not hear her open it. She thought he had gone in and said,

"Dick, Dick, I do love you, indeed I do."

He started, faintly he heard the words, but thought his ears deceived him, that it must be imagination. He sat down in an easy chair in Mat's room and dozed for half-an-hour, when he opened his eyes he saw the trainer looking at him.

"I came down early," said Mat. "I thought perhaps I'd catch you alone, that you would not turn in."

"I must go up and finish dressing," said Dick.

"A word before you do," said Mat. "It will be impossible for me to continue training for you as things stand."

"Very well," said Dick. "I will have the horses removed."

"There's Trixie," said Mat.

"She had better go too," said Dick.

Mat had not expected this, he thought Dick would have been anxious for her to remain with him until after the Cup.

So he was, but he did not let the trainer see it.

"It's a pity to remove her before the race for the Cup," said Mat.

"Is it?" said Dick.

"I understand her, and I have prepared her for the race," said Mat.

"You suggested my horses should be removed," said Dick.

"They need not go until after the Woodcote Meeting."

"I thought you might order them off to-day," said Dick.

"You turned your sister out, why not my horses?"

Mat winced, he thought perhaps he had acted hastily, but he was not going to give in.

"The less said about my sister the better, we are only concerned with your horses," said Mat.

"You do not suppose I wish them to remain under the circumstances?" said Dick.

"No."

"I have no wish to deal unfairly with you," said Dick. "Trixie has been prepared by you for the race and you ought to have the credit if she wins. I will leave my horses here until after the Woodcote Meeting."

"Very good," said Mat. "I shall do my best to win the Cup for you."

"I know that I can trust you if you cannot trust me," said Dick.

"There's Jim crossing the yard, I must look after the horses," said Mat, as he took up his cap and went out.

Jim Ames looked bright and cheerful. The events of the night seemed to have given him hope, he might have a chance of winning Di after all. Her engagement was broken off, she was free, that was one point in his favour. Although he was glad the engagement was at an end he was very much incensed against Dick Douglas and Mrs Edgar for causing Di pain and humiliation. He had not believed there was anything, except chance, in Dick and Mrs Edgar going to London together, but now he wondered if there was more behind the scenes. It was an insult to Di at any rate, and he was angry on her account. There had been strained relations between him and Dick Douglas for some weeks. Abel Ash had been constantly at him, asking him to throw over Dick and come to Clinch's stable. It would be one way of showing his contempt for Dick's conduct towards her if he refused to ride for him, or if he did as Clinch suggested, and helped the Broker to win. Jim worked himself up into a sort of frenzy over what he called Di's wrongs. He was in a suitable frame of mind for Clinch and Ash to act upon.

Mat spoke to him, then went on to Trixie's box.

Dick Douglas came out of the cottage a few minutes later.

"Going to ride the mare this morning?" asked Dick.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Jim.

"She will remain under Mat's care until after the cup," said Dick.

66 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Are you changing trainers?" asked the jockey surprised.

"Yes, my horses could not very well remain here after the ridiculous scene of last night," said Dick.

"No, I suppose not," said Jim.

"You don't believe there was anything wrong?" said Dick.

"I don't know what to think."

"Yes you do, you know quite well what Mrs Edgar said is true."

Jim made no reply.

"Don't you?" said Dick.

"Appearances were dead against you," said Jim. "I am sorry for Miss Lawson. I think she has been badly treated."

"You have some motive in saying this," said Dick angrily.

"No motive at all. I do not think you have behaved at all well to her."

"Your opinion will not trouble me," said Dick.

"Perhaps I'll cause you trouble in a way you little think of," muttered Jim.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BACKLIFT

"If she had not put in an appearance and spoilt our game we should have had the mare 'ate,'" said Clinch, as he sat in his room at Acacia Villa, with Ben Blower and Abel Ash.

"We're lucky to get out of it so well," said Ash.

"You were in a blue funk all the time," said Ben.

"I heard your teeth chattering when you saw her," retorted Abel.

"You made such an infernal row," growled Clinch.

"Will she split?" asked Ash.

"I think I can manage her, I don't throw chances away," he said.

"I wish I had never gone with you," said Abel. "If it gets out I shall be ruined, no one will give me a mount."

"What you've got to do is to stick to me," said Clinch.

"The best chance is gone, we must get at Jim Ames somehow, it has to be done."

They had no idea what had taken place at Woodcote after they went away, or this might have appeared easier.

"It's not money will buy him," said Abel, "we must work on him through the girl."

"That's your business. Get him to promise to pull Trixie and I'll give you an extra hundred," said Clinch.

Next time Abel Ash met Jim Ames he learned from him what happened at Woodcote.

"Found him and Mrs Edgar in the mare's box," said Abel.

"A nice state of things that. What did I tell you about them going to town together? do you believe me now?"

"Yes," said Jim. "I think he's treated Miss Lawson shamefully, I told him so."

"You did?"

"Yes," and he said it did not trouble him much what I thought."

"Then I'd trouble him some other way."

"Exactly what came into my mind when he said it."

"I say, Jim, why not row in with us?" said Abel.

"Ride for Clinch and his stable?"

"Yes, you're a better jockey than I am," said Abel artfully; "but I'm not a bit jealous, and I'd like you to join us."

"Are you satisfied with him?"

"Quite, he's a liberal payer."

"Lace has not a good reputation," said Jim.

"Never mind about him, he has to do as he's told, you'll be under Clinch's orders not his."

"If I throw up the mount on Trixie shall I ride the Broker?" asked Jim.

"You must not throw up the mount."

Jim looked surprised. "I can't very well join Clinch and ride Trixie," he said.

"Why not?" said Abel, looking a perfect innocent.

"It's not possible."

"But it is, as easy as winking."

"What do you mean?"

"You're such a touchy beggar," said Abel, "or I'd explain."

"Fire away, I'll not hurt you," laughed Jim.

"Ride Trixie in the interests of the Broker," said Abel.

"You mean stop her—let the Broker win?"

"Put it that way if you wish."

"Which way would you put it?" asked Jim.

"I should say let the Broker win and leave out about the stopping business."

"He's no chance of beating Trixie," said Jim.

"He will have if you ride her," said Abel. "I'd pay Douglas out. He's treated you badly, now he's treated the girl the same, he deserves to be punished."

"So he does," assented Jim, "but I don't like throwing a gold cup away."

"You'll make more if you lose than if you win," said Abel.

"I like riding to win."

"So do all of us," assented Abel, "but we must make a decent living somehow, and I've found Clinch pays better for a loser than a winner."

"Does he?" said Jim, "then he must play some funny games."

"He's a wonder in that line," said Abel. "He's inventive; never came across such a man, he's full of schemes, he'd make a grand company promoter."

"I have a good mind to join him," said Jim. "Mind if I do it, it will be to pay Douglas out for treating her badly, not on my own account."

"Couldn't you ring in a bit for that as well?" asked Abel.

"Never mind me, leave me out," said Jim.

"You'd better run up to town and see Clinch. I told him I'd see you, he said if you agreed to call on him at once. Shall I wire him, the sooner it's settled the better?"

"Where is he?"

"At his rooms, 'voxy Mansions,'" said Abel.

"Yes, wire him. I'll go up by the next train, I have nothing to do."

Abel went into the telegraph office and despatched the wire. Clinch received it half-an-hour later.

"So he's coming—good, that means Abel's done it. It's the best bit of work he's shown since I handled him."

The Captain waited impatiently for Jim to arrive.

When the jockey entered his room he greeted him affably, as yet he had no idea what had taken place at Woodcote, but in the course of conversation it came out. He was vastly amused at the dilemma Miss Edgar and Dick Douglas were in, and congratulated Jim on his being free again and wished him luck.

"Tell me exactly what you wish me to do," said Jim.

"Stop Frixie and let my horse run," said Clinch.

"That's plain enough."

"I never mince matters, it only causes confusion," said Clinch.

"I never pulled a horse in my life," said Jim.

"Then it's time you began."

"I don't like the idea somehow," said Jim.

"If you don't agree to do what I ask there's nothing more to be said," replied Clinch.

"I have not declined."

"I'll make it worth your while."

"Five hundred if the Broker wins."

"Supposing he got beaten by something else, an outsider—such things happen."

"Not in a race like the Gold Cup, I can't see any danger, except from Tixie."

"Nor can I, but upsets occur."

"What are you driving at?"

"I want some money down," said Jim.

"That's not my custom."

"But I have never done anything for you before."

"You don't trust me?"

The Chance of a Lifetime 69

"I'll not say that, but I'd rather have a hundred down."

"You might throw me over," said Clinch

"That's not likely "

"Seems to me you won't trust me, and you want me to trust you," said Clinch

"Will you do as I ask?"

"If I put up a hundred it must come out of the five hundred," said Clinch

"I'll agree to that "

"Very well, I'll give it you, but you must give me an acknowledgment for it "

"Yes "

Clinch went to his safe, as he opened it Jim saw a number of jewel cases, or what looked like them "

"Are you fond of jewellery?" he asked

"Very, I am a good judge of stones, diamonds especially, I have some very fine specimens. Would you like to see them?" said Clinch

"Yes "

Clinch took out several cases, placing them on the table

As the jockey looked at them he thought how well they would become Di. He wished he could give her such a present as the diamond bracelet he held in his hand

"That's a beauty," said Clinch, "it would fetch any woman "

"You think women are to be bought with jewels?"

"Yes, such diamonds as those," said Clinch.

"What are they worth?"

"A monkey "

"Five hundred!" exclaimed Jim

"There's twenty-one, the large one in the centre, ten on each side "

"They're splendid," said Jim

"You're right, they are, it's a beautiful bracelet "

"I wish I had it "

"Do you What do you want it for?"

"A present "

"For Miss Lawson?"

"Yes "

"She'd wonder where you got it," said Clinch

"I could tell her I saved up to buy it for her "

"Very nice of you," said Clinch, watching him

"Will you let me have this instead of the four hundred?" said Jim

"You mean, a hundred cash and the bracelet?"

"Yes "

"That will be paying you more than I bargained for."

"You'll not miss it out of this lot," said Jim, pointing to the cases.

"It's the best set of diamonds I have"

"How do you know they are good stones?"

"Experience, like everything else I've paid to learn"

"Let me have them," said Jim, as Clinch turned on the electric light and the stones flashed like fire, scintillating in the light

"They're wonderful"

"I shall not give you them until the Broker's won," he said

"Very well, and you will let me have a hundred now"

"Here are the notes, count them," said Clinch

Jim counted five twenty pound notes and placed them in his pocket

Clinch wrote out a form of receipt

"Sign this," he said and Jim put his name to it "I wish I could show her the bracelet," he said

"That is not possible"

"Lend it me for a couple of days, I'll let you have it back"

"I'll think it over," said Clinch, as he put the case back into the safe

He had his back to Jim, and blocked up the doorway, with a quick movement he took up another case, exactly like the one he had shown Jim

"Do let me have it," pleaded Jim "I only want to show it her, I'll let you have it back, I promise you"

Clinch turned his head, appearing to hesitate Jim urged his request again

"You think it will help you with her?" he asked.

"I do, that's what I want it for"

"It's risky, you might lose it," said Clinch, "but I'll let you have it for a few days if you take great care of it"

Jim was delighted and thanked him eagerly

Clinch handed him the case and Jim put it in his pocket

"You shall have it back as soon as I have shown it her," he said

Clinch opened the door and Jim went out, then he sat down in his chair and laughed "You saw the real thing, my boy," he said, "but you've taken away paste, a good imitation I wasn't likely to let you carry the diamonds off, not me, I've done you a good turn, and you'll stick to me now You can have them if the Broker wins," he added with a smile, "it will pay me to let them go at four hundred—rather."

CHAPTER XVII

A TALK ON THE HEATH

JIM waited patiently, his opportunity came, he met Di walking alone on the heath, with her dog for company. Floss bounded

forward when she saw him, he was fond of dogs, and they always recognise this.

Di smiled, she liked Jim, had Dick Douglas not been in the way he would have stood a good chance

• "Floss knows her friends," she said

"Pretty little dog," said Jim, patting her curly head. She was a Skye terrier. He had the diamonds in his pocket, he had examined them several times, and had no idea Clunch had substituted paste for stones, they were a perfect imitation; the Captain possessed a good many duplicates of his best sets.

"May I walk with you?" said Jim

"I shall be very pleased," said Di, "I feel lonely," she added with a sigh

They talked about the Woodcote meeting and Frixie's chance in the cup

"You know the horses leave our stable after the meeting?" she said

"Yes," replied Jim. "It is a pity."

"Shall you go with them?" she asked

"No, your father has been a good friend to me. I will not leave him."

"Not follow Mr. Douglas?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because he has treated you badly," said Jim

"You really think—" began Di, then stopped

"He has behaved shamefully, so has Miss Edgar."

"She is gone."

"Where?"

"I do not know. She said before she went I should find out. She was my friend."

"She'd a curious way of showing her friendship."

"Well it's all over now," said Di sadly

"Perhaps it is for the best," said Jim. "Di."

"Yes, Jim."

"You know how I love you. You are free. Will you be my wife, I am a poor man compared to some of your admirers but you cannot have anyone more devoted to you," he said. "Look what I mean to give you if you like it," he said, as he opened the case.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Di. "Lovely diamonds, they must be worth a great deal."

"They are fine stones," said Jim. "I saw them when I was in town and the owner let me bring them to show you."

"But you must not spend money on me, Jim, I cannot accept them," said Di

"I shall be very disappointed if you do not. Take them, please do, and take me with them."

She smiled as she said, "The diamonds make no difference in my regard for you"

"Will you be my wife, Di? Say yes I will do all a man can for you"

"I cannot give you an answer now, Jim, it is too soon after, what has happened," she answered falteringly

He saw it would not be wise to press her further at present, but his hopes rose. She had not refused him, he would let it rest at that

"May I ask you again?" he said

"Yes, after the meeting"

"And will you accept this bracelet?"

"If I accept you I will with pleasure but I do not like you spending so much money upon it"

"I have saved up to buy you something," said Jim

"How kind you are"

"Who would not be kind to you?" he said

"Jim?"

"Yes, what is it?" something in the tone of her voice startled him

"Trixie is sure to win the Cup, is she not?" she asked, looking into his eyes

He turned his head slightly, he could not meet her questioning gaze

"I hope so," he said

"You are not sure?"

"No one can be absolutely sure of winning a race, the best of good things go wrong"

"But Trixie is regarded as a certainty by my father," she said

"I know, but I have ridden her in her work and once or twice she seemed inclined to shirk it, throw it up," said Jim.

"Have you told my father this?"

"No"

"Or Mr Douglas?"

"No"

"Then you ought to do so"

"I will if you like"

"It is not a question of what I like, it is your duty."

"Then I will do it," he said

"Thank you," said Di

They walked back to the stables, Mat saw them come in and smiled.

"Jim's losing no time," he thought, "perhaps after all she will be happier with him"

"Tell him now," said Di when she saw her father; she left Jim and went into the house.

"There's something I ought to have mentioned to you before," said Jim.

"Anything important?"

"It may and it may not, I may be wrong in my opinion, I'll leave you to judge. Once or twice I fancied Trixie seemed inclined to throw it up in her gallop," said Jim.

Mat laughed.

"Is that all?" he said.

"You think I am mistaken?" asked the jockey.

"I am sure you are, she is the most honest mare I ever handled. What made you form such an idea?"

"She put her ears back and faltered in her stride."

"She's a mare," said Mat smiling, "all the sex are a bit jady at times, but you'll find she's no shirker, she's as honest as they make 'em."

"I hope I'm wrong," said Jim. "It may be as you say. I told Di, she said it was my duty to tell you."

"Quite right, you are on good terms with her?" said Mat smiling.

"I asked her to be my wife, you once said I might some day be your son-in-law," said Jim.

"And I hoped you would be," said Mat. "I am sure you would be kind to her."

"I wish she'd give me the chance," said Jim.

"What did she say?"

"Told me it was too soon, that I must wait until after the Woodcote meeting."

"Then she did not actually refuse you?"

"No."

"I am glad of it, but why until after our meeting?" asked Mat.

"A fancy of her's I suppose," said Jim.

"Perhaps so. It is not likely she will forget what took place in a few days."

"He behaved badly," said Jim.

"So did my sister."

"Has she left?"

"Yes."

"Joe Robson believes in her," said Jim.

"He's in love, he'd believe anything she told him. She had no explanation to offer," said Mat.

"I shall stay with you when the horses go," said Jim. "I will not ride for him again, after the Cup."

"You must win that on Trixie," said Mat.

"Shall you back her?"

"No, it will be quite sufficient for me to have trained the winner."

"I suppose you'd be cut up if she lost," said Jim.

"I should be very much surprised," said Mat.

74 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Has the Broker no chance?" asked Jim.

"Yes, but he can't beat the mare," said Mat.

The Jockey was relieved to hear Mat had no intention of backing Trixie, he would have been sorry for him to lose money on the race.

Di thought over her walk and conversation with Jim. She liked him well enough, but did not love him, not like she loved Dick. Still Jim would make a good husband, she felt sure of that, and she supposed she must marry someone, it would never do to let Dick think she was determined not to marry because she had broken off her engagement with him. She wondered where Jim got the diamond bracelet from. Somehow she connected it with the doubt he expressed about Trixie. Was there any foundation for this? Why had he not told her father and Dick?

She had no wish to doubt him. She knew he was bitter against Dick, but would he do anything to stop Trixie from winning in order to injure him? No, she hardly thought that, and yet he turned his head away when she questioned him. She blamed herself for entertaining such thoughts, but they would not be banished.

"So you told Jim I ought to know what he thought about Trixie?" said Mat.

"I did."

"He's mistaken, there never was a more genuine mare."

"You think she will win?"

"I am sure of it, at least as sure as anyone can be of such a thing."

"Shall you tell Mr. Douglas?"

"What Jim said?"

"Yes."

"It is not necessary, there is nothing in it."

"And yet if she happened to lose and Jim said anything he would hear of it and might blame you," she said.

"Leave it all to me, Trixie will win all right," said Mat.

"Jim told me something else."

"That he asked me to be his wife?"

"Yes, and that you said you would not give him an answer until after our meeting, why wait till then?"

"You would like me to marry Jim?"

"I think you would be happy with him, he is a good fellow."

"I do not love him."

"I would not ask you to marry anyone you do not love, but if you came to regard him in that way it would be well I think," said her father.

"But I love Dick," said Di with tears in her eyes.

To this he had nothing to say, it was best to let her get over

it gradually. She was young, he was her first love, girls seldom married where they fixed their early affections.

Di thought of her father's question and wondered why she told Jim to wait until after the Woodcote meeting. Did she hope something might transpire during the race week to clear her aunt and Dick, and bring them together again? Yes, that was it, she felt a curious presentiment that such would be the case. How it was to come about she had no idea, but the thought was fixed in her mind and was not to be banished. "Dick, my Dick still," she said to herself. "Whispers tell me we shall come together again, that all will yet be well between us."

CHAPTER XVIII

NELHLRBY HALL, CUP FIVE

WOODCOTE meeting was a fashionable function, held once a year, and attended by all the best people in the racing and every other set. It was always eagerly looked forward to. The dresses were creations of the highest art, fashions were set there, fortunes spent on carrying out new whims and ideas. Extraordinary designs in hats were always seen, something was sure to create a sensation in this line. The weather was as a rule fine for the races, and this year proved no exception, it was glorious, ideal for such a gathering.

There were many good races in the four days' programme, but the chief interest centred in the Cup, run over a three mile course. The race had been won by some of the best horses the world had ever seen, horses whose names were household words, whose fame lived in their stock for many years. It was the height of an owner's ambition to win the Woodcote Cup, many tried, only few succeeded. The fields were never large, six to ten horses being the average, sometimes less. Considering the dimensions of the field there was always a large amount of betting, but seldom before the day of the race. On this occasion there had been some heavy wagering between the partisans of the Broker and Trixie.

Captain Clinch was regarded as a clever man, it was well known he had supported his horse to win a large sum.

It was the opinion of Joe Robson and his friends that Clinch had something up his sleeve, but they were at their wits end to discover what it was. Clinch backed the Broker as though the race were over, but he must know Trixie had an excellent chance of beating him.

"If it was any other rider but Jim Ames I'd say he'd been got at," said Joe, "but there's no chance of Clinch fooling him, Jim always ride straight."

Mrs Edgar was staying with Joe's sister, the bookmaker had rooms in London. He consulted her as to what she thought of Jim Ames, and she expressed confidence in him.

"You don't think a man like Clinch could get round him?" asked Joe.

"Not without he had some hold over him," she said.

"He may have," said Joe, "I can't find any other solution of the mystery."

"Unless he really fancies the Broker is the better of the pair," she said.

Joe was firmly convinced Mrs Edgar had known Clinch for some time, probably in America, but he did not question her, he was determined to wait and find out all about it in due course.

Mrs Edgar was naturally much upset at the breaking off of the engagement between Di and Dick. She intended doing her utmost to bring them together again, it was difficult to see how this could be done without telling exactly what happened at Woodcote that night. This was impossible, without she was prepared to face Clinch's accusations, and up to the present she had not steeled herself to it, although she was rapidly drifting in that direction.

Clinch did not know where she was, he was aware she had left Woodcote and wished to find her address. She had always attracted him, he thought now she was alone he might induce her to share his lot, he forgot how he had injured her beyond hope of forgiveness.

Joe persuaded Mrs Edgar and his sister to go to Woodcote for the meeting.

"You'll help me to bring Di and Mr Douglas together again if you can," she said.

"Of course I will, we must think of some plan, it is not impossible, because they are still in love, and I fancy quite willing to let bygones be bygones if an opportunity offers," said Joe.

"There may be a chance at the meeting," she said.

"I hope so, we must look out for it," he answered.

Dick Douglas was most anxious about the Cup race. Bob and Lady Betty were staying at Netherby for the week and Trixie's chances were discussed every night. They were Di's staunch friends, at the same time firm believers in Dick and Mrs Edgar.

Betty had given Mat a bit of her mind about "that affair," and lectured Di on her want of faith in her brother until the girl cried bitterly, when the kind-hearted Betty took her in her arms, soothed her, and told her all would come right as she was quite sure Dick loved her.

"And I love him," said Di.

"I know that, my dear," was Lady Betty's reply.

Bob took the whole affair in his usual philosophical way.

"It's a deuced rum go," he said to his wife "There's something behind it, you see if there's not."

"Don't be ridiculous, Bobby, what can there be behind it?" she said

"Possibly Mrs Edgar may be concealing something "

"There's nothing to conceal "

"Joe Robson is of opinion that Clinch is at the bottom of the business "

"Then Mr Robson is as bad as you are, what can Captain Clinch have to do with it?"

"I really don't know, it's beyond me, but that's what Joe persists in, and he's always worth backing when he has an opinion. You see he was at Woodcote that night and saw Mrs Edgar and Dick. He says she was so frightened that he'd swear she saw someone trying to enter Trixie's box and that she concealed the fact," said Bob

"If that is the case why on earth did she not tell them?" said Betty

"For reasons best known to herself, but I'll bet Joe's right, he always is "

"You have great faith in him," she said

"I have, I like him, he's straight," said Bob

"Have you said anything to Dick about this?"

"No, and I'd advise you not to do so "

"Why?"

"He's such a beggar to jump at conclusions, I believe he'd think Clinch was there that night, trying to get at the mare, and that Mrs Edgar saw him," said Bob

"That is not at all likely. Captain Clinch may be an outsider, but he would not be likely to try and get at Trixie in the box, he'd prefer to bribe Jim Ames," said Betty

"You don't think there's any danger in that quarter?" said Bob, surprised

"I really do not know what to think, I'll leave it to you clever men to find out "

"Don't be nasty, Betty," said Bob

Dick Douglas had several friends at Netherby Hall. He had been fortunate since the sale. Some shares in a mine, which he thought lost, had suddenly gone up by leaps and bounds—he had sold out, realising a considerable sum of money. If Trixie lost the Gold Cup, however, that would go, and more with it, but it tidied over affairs for the time being

At Betty's suggestion Dick invited Lord Lovett to Netherby for the week

"I've a good mind to accept," said his lordship,

"I wish you would," said Betty, sweetly.

"Do you indeed, my dear?" said Lord Lovett "I think it would be what Bob would call 'a regular let in' if I did"

"Dick would be delighted to see you at Netherby"

"Oh no, he would not, I know better He has asked me, knowing very well I shall refuse, because I hate racing Who put him up to it?"

"He asked you out of respect for you as my father-in-law," said Betty unblushingly

Lord Lovett laughed, then said, "You may kiss me, Betty, you're a minx"

"And you are a very nice old dear," said Betty. "I am quite fond of my father-in-law he is so good and kind to us."

"Is he?" said Lord Lovett with a grimace

"Yes he is, you know I mean it," she said

"Betty?"

"Yes"

"I suppose that mare of Dick's will win the Cup?"

"I hope so, we all think she will"

"Then you can invest a hundred on her and I'll give you the winnings," said Lord Lovett

"You are good," she said, kissing him again

"It surprises me how you get round him," said Bobby, when she told him what had happened "I never can"

"You don't go the right way about it," she said

"So he has not accepted my invitation," said Dick, laughing "You were quite safe in recommending me to send it"

"What do you think he has done?"

"I don't know, something out of the common?"

"Yes, he asked me to put a hundred on Trixie, and said I could have the winnings," said Betty

"It must be his first wager," said Dick laughing

"I hope it will not be his last on the same terms," said Bob

The first two days of the meeting were a great success, the third day was Cup day The Netherby Hall party so far had done well, and they were determined to put their winnings on Trixie in the Cup.

Captain Clinch had won two races and was in high feather; the Broker had beaten them in a trial and on his merits alone seemed to have a chance of beating Trixie in the Cup There was, however, another plot hatching in Clinch's brain, had been for some time, which he imparted to Ben Blower The daring originality of the scheme appealed to Ben, it put the seal on the Captain's fame as an inventor, in his estimation

"We have Jim Ames safe," said Clinch, to his factotum; "the Broker has a real good chance for that, and if anything should happen and he is beaten we have our other little scheme to fall back upon. You'll look a rum object disguised as a

cinematograph operator, at any rate you'll have a respectable occupation for once in your life. Do not forget the box, Ben, be sure of the box, it's most important."

"As an operator I am not likely to forget that," said Ben, grinning.

CHAPTER XIX

"WHAT DO YOU THINK, JIM?"

CUP day, brilliant sunshine, good going, a huge crowd, a dazzling, wonderful scene. Woodcote was a fit setting for this exquisite picture. Although the heath was bare of trees, the surroundings of the race course were picturesque. There were many fine old elms and chestnuts at the back of the stand, several in the paddock, and the flower beds were gay with myriad colours. A waving mass of light and beauty, a scene to be remembered, a memorable meeting.

The house party at Netherby were astir early. The men wandered about in the park-like grounds, the ladies were preparing for the fray. Dick opened a letter just delivered by a groom from Cottstone. It was from Lord Lovett, and read as follows:

"Betty informs me your mare Trixie will win the Cup to-day, I hope she does for your sake. Of course you never intended me to accept your invitation to Netherby, that was your sister's doing, clever girl Betty. If the mare wins I shall feel inclined to come and spoil sport and bring my gout with me. Don't let Bob make a fool of himself, I shall not pay his losses."

He laughed when he finished and thought,

"The old fellow is not such a bad sort."

It was an anxious time for Mat Lawson. The mare was fit, could not be better, but there was something wrong with Jim Ames.

The jockey went about in a listless way, avoided the trainer, and, much to her astonishment, did also. What was the matter with him?

"You don't look very fit," said Mat on the morning of the race, as the jockey came into the yard.

"I'm all right," said Jim, "I'm anxious, that's all."

"You're not nervous, are you?"

"No, I'm never troubled with that complaint."

"Trixie is as fit as can be, she'll win," said Mat.

"I hope so," said Jim.

"You have not lost confidence in her?"

"No, but Ash tells me the Broker gave lumps of weight away

to those two horses of Clinch's that won on the first two days, and beat them badly, that is a good trial."

"We can beat it," said Mat.

"Am I to ride my own race?" asked Jim.

"Yes, you are always given a free hand."

"As this is a special occasion I thought perhaps I should ride to orders. Supposing Mr. Douglas gives me instructions?" said Jim.

"You will obey them of course, at the same time you will tell me what they are, but I do not think he is likely to do so," said Mat.

Di was anxious about Jim, she heard he had been seen about with Ash and Captain Clinch. Lottie Doubleday told her, she had failed to come up to Clinch's expectations and he had consequently neglected to pay sufficient attention to her charms. She resented this and was quite ready to gossip about him to Di, also to tell her, with numerous exaggerations, about Jim's visits to Acacia Villa. Di was not particularly fond of Lottie, although she was on good terms with her, still she had no reason to doubt what she told her.

Di said nothing about this to her father, but made up her mind to question Jim. She anticipated seeing him before he went to the course, but he left early and she had no opportunity. She was going to the races with some friends, and intended having a word or two with him in the paddock. She did not wish to doubt him, but the fact that he had been to Acacia Villa more than once, and had long interviews with Clinch, seemed to require some explanation. He was too fond of her to resent her questions, and she thought she knew him well enough to guess what he had in his mind.

She had not met either Dick, or her aunt, since the night the engagement was broken off. If chance threw them in her way on the course she would not avoid them, she had too much spirit for that, they should see she did not suffer, that she had quite recovered from the first shock.

She looked a charming picture in her dainty costume and becoming hat. As Mat Lawson's daughter she was well known and many people recognised her as she walked about the paddock.

"Never saw you looking better," said Bob. "Upon my word you're charming."

He took charge of her and they went across to where Lady Betty stood with a group of friends. There was no jealousy about Betty; when she saw a well-dressed woman she admired her, there were no pangs of envy, probably because she held her own and knew it.

"That is one of the prettiest gowns I have seen," she said, looking at Di's dress.

"Do you like it?"

"It becomes you admirably, poor Dick, he'll succumb again when he sees you."

Mrs Edgar was there with Miss Robson, and as they met Dick spoke to her aunt. This was a hopeful sign, so thought Mrs Edgar, who half expected her niece would ignore her. No mention was made about the misunderstanding, merely a few questions and answers passed about the race.

Joe Robson was in the ring, doing a big business, he meant winning if Trixie did, and laid against the Broker when he had a chance.

Captain Clinch was brimful of confidence, even if the Broker, by any possible chance was beaten he had something left up his sleeve. He had reason for his confidence, Jim Ames was safe, Trixie would carry more than her owner bargained for. Nothing had leaked out, the mare was favourite at evens, the Broker at two to one, the Captain had the worst of the wager with Dick Douglas at the odds, but was quite contented. He was dressed in the best style, looked a gentleman, but his outward appearance was no indication of the inner man, many a scoundrel has a fair seeming, Clinch was one of the class. He had the audacity to speak to Mrs Edgar, she trembled with anxiety, she was never quite sure what he would do, and had no desire to be seen conversing with him. She explained to Miss Robson who he was and said she had met him at Netherby Hall at the sale.

"He seems to admire you," said Miss Robson smiling.

"I do not like him, I think he is not what he pretends to be," said Mrs Edgar.

"That's what Joe says, he can't bear the man."

"Your brother is right, as he generally is."

Clinch avoided Jim Ames until he saw him in a quiet spot alone.

"Come here for a minute," said Clinch, and they stepped to the back of one of the sheds.

"You mean to ride in my interests?" said Clinch.

"Yes."

"And Trixie will not win?"

"Not if I can help it."

"That's right, you stick to me and I'll stick to you," said Clinch. "No one has any suspicion, I suppose?"

"No, how can they have?"

"People imagine funny things sometimes, I thought Lawson might have said something to you."

"Not a word."

"Did Miss Lawson?"

"No."

"I shall win a pile if the Broker gets home."

"It appears to be a safe thing," said Jim.

They came round the corner of the shed, at that moment Di caught sight of them, she saw Clinch nod as he left the jockey—had they been together, if so for what purpose? Di loved Dick Douglas, nothing that had happened had lessened her affection for him, she was also very anxious her father should win the Cup for him. She had an idea that over the rejoicings at the victory matters would be put right again, they would all be friends, and everything would go on as before.

She must speak to Jim, now was her opportunity. Bob Lovett was still with her.

"I want to see Jim Ames for a few moments," she said, "please excuse me," and she went off before he had time to stop her.

The jockey saw her coming, shrank from meeting her, but saw no chance of avoiding her.

He greeted her with a smile, but Di thought it different from his old honest, steadfast look. There was something wrong—she was sure of it, she must find out what it was.

"Brimful of confidence, I suppose," she said with a smile.

"I hope the mare will run well," he said.

"She is sure to do that, but she must do more, she must win. You think she will?"

"You never can tell," he said.

"Jim, there's something wrong," she said quickly, looking at him with a searching gaze.

"With the mare?" he asked.

"No, with you," said Di.

"You are mistaken, there is nothing wrong with me."

"Do you love me, Jim?"

"You know I do, better than anything in the world."

"Will you prove your love for me to-day?"

"Yes, to-day and at all times."

"Even supposing Mr Douglas and I came together again?"

"Yes, even supposing that," said Jim in a low voice.

"You were with Captain Clinch, Jim, before I came up," said Di.

"I saw him."

"You know him?"

"Yes."

"What were you talking about?" she asked.

"The race."

"He thinks the Broker will win?" said Di questioningly.

"He does."

"What do you think, Jim?" said Di.

CHAPTER XX

"I'M RIDING TO WIN"

FOR a few moments the jockey hesitated, then said,

"I think she has a very good chance, but you never can tell"

"A month or more back you were confident she would win, what has happened to cause you to change your mind?" asked Di

"Nothing in particular"

"Tell me the truth, Jim? You are not doing so"

He was not at all angry with her for putting the questions, he hated to deceive her

"I have told you the truth I think she ought to run well," he said

Di put her hand on his arm and said kindly,

"Jim, this is not like you, I thought you loved me, would do anything for me"

"So I do, I will do what you wish"

"You know why you doubt Trixie will win, tell me"

"I cannot," he said

"You have always gone straight, do nothing crooked now—you will bitterly repent it if you do"

"Can't you trust me?" he asked

"I always have trusted you," she said

"What reason have you to doubt me?"

"I saw you with Captain Clinch"

"That proves nothing"

"But it means a great deal"

"He is not a friend of mine," said Jim

"Then why be influenced by him?"

"I am not"

"I see you are, I am certain of it. Jim, for my sake, tell me everything and I will stand by you as I have always done"

"You love Mr Douglas"

"I do," said Di honestly

"And if you come together again there is no chance for me?"

"No, I am sorry, but it is so," she said

"And yet you wish me to do this for you, to tell you all you surmise."

"Yes, for my sake and your own, for his and my father's, for the sake of your reputation, your good name," said Di earnestly.

"You take it for granted I am in Clinch's pay," said Jim bitterly.

"What I believe is that, acting under a mistaken sense of injury, you have decided to do something you will always regret"

"And supposing I have"

"Think what will happen, you will be ruined, your reputation

84 The Chance of a Lifetime

will be lost, it has taken you many years to 'make it' " said Di " Remember how my father has helped you, what a good master Mr Douglas has been, think of Trixie, she ought to win, you know it "

Jim Ames looked uneasy, his conscience pricked him, he loved Di—win or lose her, how could he deceive her? She saw him wavering and again urged him to confide in her

" I can't stand it any longer," said Jim " I will ride straight, Di, I promise you "

She was delighted, she took him by the hand and said,

" I will always be your true friend, Jim "

" Clinch worked me up to it, he said I could be revenged on Mr Douglas for taking you away from me, he offered me a large sum, and, like a fool, I was tempted and accepted. But I'll not do it, Di. I'll not do it, I'll let him know before the race that I am going to ride straight as I have always done," he said, much agitated.

" I can trust you now," said Di

" Yes. Trixie will win if I can do it, I will ride my best, you have nothing to fear. My love for you has conquered "

Dick Douglas came upon them before he saw Di. He raised his hat and held out his hand, she took it, then turning away went to Lady Betty. Dick looked after her, a smile on his face, she had taken his hand—that was going in the right direction, it meant reconciliation. Next time they might speak and be friends again

" I am not going to give you instructions," said Dick " You know the mare, and how to ride the race. I may as well tell you I have heard rumours that you have been bought over by Clinch. I don't believe it. You have always ridden straight and I will trust you. Don't trouble to contradict the report, it is a vile scandal. We have not been on very good terms lately; let all that be forgotten, win for me on Trixie, and I shall not forget you "

" I thank you for your confidence," said Jim " I will do my best as I have always done "

He thought how different it would have been except for Di, he hated himself for having given Clinch's proposal a thought, much more for having accepted it

" Has Mat given you any orders?" asked Dick

" No, he said perhaps you might, but he did not think you would,"

" You had better dress," said Dick, " there is no time to lose "

Jim Ames went to the jockeys' room; Abel Ash was there, putting on the black jacket of Clinch

" You're late," he said.

" Plenty of time," replied Jim, " it never takes me long "

"I don't mind telling you," said Ash, "that I'm jolly glad you are rowing in with us, the Broker has no chance with Trixie."

"Are you sure?" asked Jim

"On his merits none, with you on the mare's back of course it's a cert," said Ash

Jim's fate was turned away from him, or Clinch's jockey would have noticed a peculiar look of triumph in his eyes

"Yes, as you say, it's a cert," said Jim, adding under his breath, "for Trixie"

"We'll have a good time after this," said Ash "We'll make Clinch do the thing properly, it means a good many nights out"

"I suppose so," said Jim, "no end of money in it, eh?"

"Heaps," said Ash, "if we work it properly"

"I'll do my best to work it," said Jim, as he slipped on the yellow jacket, with black sleeves, and donned the black cap

In Tattersalls the excitement worked up to fever heat a pitched battle going on between the partisans of Trixie and the Broker—the money seemed inexhaustible on either side

Captain Clinch betted heavily, he had won largely at the meeting, his credit was good, but he had some thousands on his horse that he could not pay if he lost

Joe Robson was more than puzzled, he was dumbfounded at the way Clinch and his associates piled money on the Broker

"They must know something," he muttered "Men like these never back horses at this price unless it's a moral I wonder if Jim Ames is safe I'm beginning to doubt it, but I don't like to."

"Well, Joe, how are things going?" asked Dick

"Cannot make them out," said Joe "Are you sure all is right with the mare?"

"Certain, she beautiful, a perfect picture, she is sure to win," said Dick.

"I hope she does, all I can say is, if Trixie wins Clinch and his pals have made the biggest blunder of their lives, they'll be broke to a man," said Joe

Dick returned to the paddock for a minute or two, saw Jim in the saddle, shook his hand and went to the stand.

Clinch saw him and smiled

"You'll not shake his hand after the race," he thought

He hurried up to have a final word as Jim passed him on Trixie

Jim saw him, leaned over in the saddle, and Clinch said,

"Good luck Don't forget my fellow has to win somehow"

The jockey looked Clinch straight in the face as he said,

"You've made a mistake, I'm going to ride straight, I'm riding to win"

Jim saw the look in Clinch's face, it was terrible, he almost forgot where he was, and raised his clenched fist as though to strike him. He did not doubt what the jockey said, he knew it was true. He cursed him, vowed vengeance on him, but that did not improve the situation. There was no time to lose, something must be done, Trixie's win was the chance of a lifetime for Dick, if the Broker lost it would be Clinch's last chance. He hurried out of the paddock on to the course. The horses started for the Cup race opposite the stand. People crowded on the rails, six deep, it was almost impossible to get through, a policeman tried to stop him, but he was too quick. He jostled and pushed his way towards the starting post, would he get there in time? If he failed there would be no hope at all, for Ash was unaware of Jim's intentions, and would take things easily, thinking Trixie was safe.

At last he reached the place and crushed through the crowd—angry words, blows, were showered on him, as he reached the rails. He called out in a loud voice to Ash. The jockey heard him, saw something was wrong, and pulled the Broker across to him.

"He's sold us, he's going to ride the mare to win, knock him over, anything, she must not win at any price," gasped Clinch.

"You're sure?" asked Ash.

"He told me as he rode out," and Clinch showered a volley of curses on the offender.

"Then I'll make it hot for him," said Ash, savagely. The starter called out to him and he pulled the Broker into line.

Jim Ames had seen Clinch and knew what he was there for, he intended to watch Abel Ash closely in the race, there was no telling what he might do.

The Broker was on the rails, Trixie on the outside, so there were four horses between them, six starters in all.

Clinch rushed back to try and reach the ring before the race was over, he might possibly back Trixie to win him a thousand and thus hedge a little. He ran across the course and gained the paddock, as he did so he collided with a man carrying a long box, it was Ben Blower, disguised as a cinematograph operator. So clever was the make-up that Clinch did not recognise him at first—when he did a feeling of relief came over him, there was the other plan to fall back upon, all was not yet lost.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RACE BEGINS

"YOU know where to stand," said Clinch. "Jim Ames has gone back on us, curse him. I wish I had not trusted him."

You see the Cup, there is only one man in charge of it, watch your opportunity, if my horse loses I'll singal to you from the corner of that stand, then do your best"

"So he's ratted, has he?" said Ben savagely; "we ought to get even with him"

"If I can I will," said Clinch

"How much is Douglas's wager with you?"

"Five thousand that Trixie beats the Broker, and that we drink her health out of the Gold Cup, the night after the race, at Netherby Hall," said Clinch.

"We'll win that five thousand even if the mare beats the Broker," said Ben.

"That depends upon you"

"I'll manage it somehow," said Ben

"The motor is outside the entrance gate, you know it, you will make no mistake, Billy drives, he's there now"

A loud shout proclaimed the horses were off and Clinch hurried away, when he reached Fattersalls he tried to back Trixie, but found no layer

Di had seen Miss Edgar after she had spoken to Jim

"Tell Mr Robson Jim says the mare is sure to win," she said.

"Di, I am so sorry, I hope—" began her aunt

"Go, or send at once," said Di, leaving her

Mrs Edgar caught sight of Steve Banks, she knew him, having spoken to him once or twice

"Will you please tell Mr Robson that Jim Ames says it is all right, Trixie will win," she said

He looked surprised, then said,

"I'll do my best to see him"

"Tell him Miss Lawson told me and wished him to know," she said.

Steve pushed through the crowd in the ring and reached Joe Robson, who stood against the rails

"Well, Steve, what is it?" asked the bookmaker.

He told him what Miss Edgar had said

"By jove that was it," said Joe "I knew it It's Miss Lawson has saved the situation, wait here Steve, you stand a 'pony' to nothing with me on the mare."

Steve looked after him, lost in amazement, he failed to understand what he meant, except that he had twenty-five pounds to nothing about the mare

Joe went to several bookmakers and succeeded in getting another five hundred on the mare at evens This was "the office," things must be all right, there was no more money to lay against Trixie The news that Joe Robson was backing the mare again spread rapidly, mysteriously, as such information always does in the ring in the most wonderful way. When

Clinch tried to back the mare he found it impossible, he must abide the result as best he could

Boycot led, a merry pace, he was a stayer, his owner considered he had an outside chance, his orders were to wear the others down. The Laird, Freedom, and Make Haste, were next, then came Trixie, and the Broker

Abel Ash had made up his mind what to do, he would keep close to Trixie no matter how Jim Ames rode. There was a black dangerous look on Ash's face. Jim knew what it meant, he must shake him off before the finish

Boycot led for a mile and a half, then fell back several lengths, but he was still in front—Make Haste in second place, the favourite, and the Broker still in the rear

The huge crowd on the stands watched every move, the noise ceased, it would break out with tremendous force later on

Boycot's jockey wore a white jacket, it stood out conspicuously, and he had a long lead

There was, however, plenty of time. Jim Ames knew what was required, Trixie had a fine turn of speed, it would come in well at the finish. Ash looked ahead and hesitated. Should he leave the mare and dash off in pursuit of the leader. The Broker would stay the three miles, he might get such a lead that Trixie would not catch him, after all he might win. Jim Ames had sold them, there would be no division of the spoil with him

At the end of two miles Ash sent his mount ahead, the Broker left Trixie, passed the Laird and Freedom, drew level with Make Haste, headed him, was within three lengths of Boycot. It was a dashing move, a loud cheer greeted it, Clinch saw the black jacket lying handy and his hopes rose

Jim Ames smiled as he saw the Broker forge ahead, he made no attempt to follow him. Trixie improved her position without any undue exertion

Dick, standing in the midst of his friends, kept his eyes on the yellow and black, he was afraid Jim might be tempted to ride the Broker down, when he saw the mare creeping up steadily he smiled

"Jim will be left if he doesn't mind," said Bob, "that was a fine run of the Broker's"

"He's riding as he ought," said Dick. "The Broker will feel the effects of that spurt, wait a bit till Trixie comes up the straight"

Mat Lawson had a good view of the race from the trainers' stand, it did not shake his confidence when the Broker left Trixie behind

Di knew a good deal about racing, but had not the judgment to recognise that Jim was saving the mare for the finish. Her

heart beat rapidly, her pulses ~~tangled~~, Trixie was a long way behind, was Jim riding straight, had he ~~deceived~~ her? Many old race-goers shook their heads, they thought Jim Ames was lying too far back, there was every excuse for Di making the same mistake

Five furlongs more and the race would be over. Not a hundred people took notice of Boycot, The Laird, Freedom and Make Haste, the interest centred in Trixie and the Broker, the latter nearly level with the leader, the mare far behind.

Dick Douglas began to have doubts, it was high time Jim made his run—had there been any truth in those reports after all? No, he would not believe it, he would trust his jockey. A moment later and he knew that he had done right, every atom of doubt was shattered. Jim Ames was riding with judgment, at every stride Trixie gained ground and had not been called upon to make an effort. The crowd realised the favourite was moving forward with deadly certainty, they saw the black and yellow pass The Laird, pass Freedom, join Make Haste, still they did not cheer, the excitement was too great, the tension not relaxed as yet.

The beautiful mare, bred to stay, the blood of a grand sire and a glorious dam coursing in her veins, crept along with an easy sweeping stride, the poetry of motion, nothing like it to be seen in any other form. Trixie revelled in her task. She actually shook her head, lowered it almost level with her chest, as though she were out for an exercise canter. Jim felt the tug and smiled, Trixie was full of running, she would go ahead the moment he asked her. There was a temptation to hold her back a second or two longer, so that the final rush would be more thrilling and effective, he resisted it, not a chance must be thrown away, and the Broker was still going strong.

"It's time now, Jim," muttered Mat anxiously, watching every move with keen practised eyes. Four furlongs more, the last half mile.

Jim shook the mare up, in a moment she passed Make Haste and caught the fast falling back Boycot, she was within a length and a half of the Broker. The cheers broke out, they were deafening, there was no doubt about Dick's colours being far more popular than the Captain's.

"Trixie, Trixie."

The mare's name rang over the course, Ben Blower heard it as he stood not far from the table where the gold cup was placed.

"Trixie, Trixie."

"The Broker. The Broker."

The back of the stands were deserted, there was no one about. The attendant in charge of the Cup looked at the stairs leading

to the stand, he wished to see the finish, it promised to be one of the most exciting on record

He went up two or three steps, turned and looked at the Cup, the horse must be nearing the winning post, he could tell by the shouting Ben Blower watched him, smiling softly to himself.

"He'll do it," thought Ben, "he'll nip up to see the finish"

He hid at the side of the small covered stand on which stood the Cup The man looked about, but saw no one near, all was safe.

The noise became deafening, a regular uproar, he knew the horses must be nearing the winning post

The temptation was irresistible, he must see the finish

Ben Blower looked cautiously around and saw Clinch signal

At this moment the man in charge of the Cup dashed up the stairs. Quick as lightning Ben Blower shot out, seized the Cup and slipped it in his bag. He went towards the back of the stand, where the crowd came down after the race. The uproar was deafening, it was evidently a tremendous finish

CHAPTER XXII

THE CUP'S CONE

TRIXIE was going ahead in gallant style, she reached the Broker's girths. Abel Ash saw her, also Jim Ames, and knew defeat was at hand. He strained every nerve to keep his mount in front, the Broker answered gallantly, he was a good horse, far too honest to be owned by Captain Clinch. Dick Douglas watched, an eager, expectant look on his face, the chance of a lifetime was coming off, Trixie would win.

All his friends were jubilant, already cheering the prospect of victory.

Trixie was almost level with the Broker at the distance, the pair fighting a gallant battle, both jockeys riding well. Neck and neck they struggled, but the mare was the fresher of the two—that fast run earlier in the race had taken it out of the Broker.

A magnificent fight, so said the spectators, but Trixie had plenty left in her and Jim knew it. She was a head in front of the Broker and Abel Ash was hard pressed. What was he to do, could he stop Trixie in any way, or pay out Jim Ames? He raised his whip, swished it round quickly, missed Trixie's ears, and struck Jim across the face, almost blinding him. The blow was seen from the stands and a howl of execration greeted the foul stroke, it seemed deliberate, and so it was.

Jim could hardly see, his eyes smarted, but he kept his head clear, and rode Trixie hard for the first time. The gallant mare, answering every call, shot to the front, leaving the Broker

as though he were standing still. Clinch saw he was defeated, and at that moment gave the signal to Ben Blower.

Trixie passed the judge's box three lengths ahead of the Broker, with Make Haste third.

What a glorious victory! It was immensely popular, the cheering was tremendous. This was not alone on account of the favourite's success. Dick Douglas was popular, and it was well known how Trixie had been saved from falling into the hands of Captain Clinch at the Netherby Hall sale. There was an air of romance about the mare, and this added additional interest to her win. The foul blow given by Abel Ash was deeply resented. As Jim rode the mare in to weigh he was cheered again and again. He had a nasty weal across the face, a deep red mark, one eye was closed.

Despite the pain he was exultant, and felt but little of it in the excitement of the moment. A tumult of thoughts surged in his mind, how different the scene had it not been for Di. Instead of cheers there would have been groans, instead of victory an ignominious, disgraceful defeat. He was thankful he had given way to his better feelings at the last, and ridden to win. There was, however, a sense of shame in him that he had been tempted and succumbed to Clinch.

When Abel Ash rode the Broker in he was greeted with hooting and groans. He looked sullen, and was glad to slip into the weighing room. He had lost the race, and no doubt Jim Ames would lodge a complaint against him.

Dick Douglas asked Jim whether the blow was intentional, he said it was, there could be no doubt about it.

"You ought to bring him before the stewards," said Dick.

"No, let it rest," said Jim. "I won the race, so what does it matter?"

"It was a cowardly blow," said Dick.

Mat Lawson was holding the mare, a large crowd followed her into the paddock. Trixie walked jauntily, she was not at all distressed, she looked fit to run the race over again.

Dick's friends were her chief admirers, she had won their money, and they were enthusiastic in her praise. Di went timidly forward and congratulated Dick on his win. He thanked her, but said nothing more, he had not forgotten the wrong she had done in doubting him.

While they were all talking, and Dick received the numerous congratulations showered on him, there was some excitement in the paddock, of which at present he did not know the cause.

"Remember you are all to drink my health and the mare's, out of the Gold Cup at Netherby Hall to-morrow night, that was part of my wages with Clinch," said Dick.

"We will be there, never fear," they said joyfully.

"What's wrong?" asked Dick, looking round on the excited crowd near the stand

"Don't know," said Bob "Supposing we go and see and have a look at this precious cup"

"Come along then," said Dick laughing, "and inspect my property"

They came to the table where the Cup had been exhibited, it was not there Many people recognised Dick Someone said,

"The Cup has been stolen"

Dick laughed, as he replied

"You're joking I expect it has been taken away for some one to see it"

"The Cup's stolen right enough," remarked another

The attendant stood there with a scared look on his face

"What's this about the Cup?" asked Dick

"It's gone"

"Gone where?"

"Stolen, someone cleaned off with it I turned my back for a moment and when I looked round it was gone I never had such a fright"

The man looked as white as a sheet, it was a serious matter for him

At this moment the secretary came up

"Is this true?" asked Dick "Has the Cup been stolen?"

"I am sorry to say it is missing, it is a most extraordinary affair," he answered

"Have you no idea where it is?" asked Bob

"No, and the man in charge appears to have lost his senses," said the secretary, irritably

The news had by this time spread about the course and furnished additional excitement Dick looked serious, if the Cup was gone there would be no chance of drinking out of it at Netherby Hall to-morrow night and he would lose his wager with Clinch, five thousand would be a big slice out of his winnings, it was most aggravating after the mare's victory.

"This is a pretty go," said Bob "Where the deuce can it have got to?"

"They must find you another Cup," said Betty

"That will take time, there will be no duplicate ready by to-morrow night," said Dick

"I don't know what induced you to make such a silly wager," said Bob

"It's all very well to be wise after the event," said Betty.

When Joe Robson heard the Cup was stolen he immediately thought of the wager Dick Douglas had made with Captain Clinch.

"Five thousand," he said to himself, "a useful sum to a man like Clinch. I wonder if he knows where it is."

Later on he saw Dick and said,

"Have you seen Clinch about?"

"Yes, not ten minutes ago, he said he was sorry the Broker had lost, but it was a stroke of luck for him that the Cup was missing. 'I shall be there to-morrow to drink your health out of it,' he said with a malicious grin," said Dick

"Doesn't it strike you he may know where it is?" said Joe

"He's the most interested party in its disappearance"

"I never thought of that," said Dick "But it's impossible, he'd never run the risk"

"Why not? I'll bet he's run far greater risks than that," said Joe

"It's not to be thought of," said Dick

"Some of his pals may have stolen it"

"You put him down as the leader of a gang of sharpers," said Dick, smiling

"That's about what he is in my opinion. I have heard some funny stories about him," said Joe

"There's a chance it may be found before to-morrow night," said Dick

"Not a ghost of a show, the clever beggars have got away with it, I shouldn't wonder if it's in the melting pot in an hour or so, the thing must have been well planned, I'll say that for them"

"The barefaced impudence of it amuses me," said Dick

"No one would ever think of anyone stealing the Cup in this crowd," said Joe "That's just where they found it easy."

"It takes the gilt off the winnings," said Dick

"You will pay Clinch to-morrow night?"

"I must"

"He owes a heap of money. I think it ought to be held over until settling day. He owes me a good bit from last week. I am going to see him to-morrow morning before the races and I'll make him pay up"

"Does he owe you much over the Cup?" asked Dick

"About a thousand, maybe more. As soon as he gets your money he'll do a bolt," said Joe "It will be hard on us."

"I must pay," said Dick, "if the Cup is not forthcoming, you can take what steps you like after he has the money. Come to Netheby and see about it"

"I'll be there," said Joe, chuckling

Di met Jim Ames after the race, she took his hand and said, "You rode splendidly. Are you not glad you listened to my advice?"

"I am indeed," he said, "but for you, Di, I should be a disgraced man, I thought of that as I rode to weigh in, and blessed you. You were my good angel; had I not listened to you it would have been all over with me"

"We will never say anything about it, Jim," she said

"I don't know so much about that," he said "Someday I may tell Mr Douglas, and if I do he shall know who saved me from being a scoundrel"

"I wish I could reward you as you wish," said Di, "but Jim, I do love him so, I do indeed"

"And I'm sure he loves you," said the jockey "Di, it will cut me up awfully to see you another man's wife, but if I can help you in any way I will."

He put his hand to his eye, the pain made him wince

"How selfish of me," she said, "I forgot you were in pain. Let me bind this over it," and she took out her handkerchief and tied it neatly over the injured eye

"I shall never part with this," said Jim, touching the bandage

CHAPTER XXIII

BEN EXPLAINS

BEN BLOWER mixed with the crowd as the people swarmed down the stairs from the stand. No one would have suspected he had the Gold Cup stowed away in his bag. He walked about coolly, quite at his ease—he was a practiced scoundrel, his barefaced impudence had stood him in good stead before.

"Get out of this quick," said Clinch

"Plenty of time," answered Ben. "There's no hurry, and it disarms suspicion to take things quietly."

"It means five thousand to me," said Clinch

Ben had his instructions, he was to take the Cup to the Captain's rooms, Clinch would follow later on. He strolled out of the gate, as he passed a constable said,

"Done for the day, eh?"

"Yes, we only wanted the big race, it will be at the Empire to-night."

"Wish I could see it, I didn't get a chance here."

Ben walked slowly to the motor, got inside, and was driven away. In due course he reached his lodgings, changed his clothes, put the Cup in a hand bag and walked round to Clinch's rooms.

The Captain was not there, so he strolled out again into the Stand, where he met a chum and they went into a bar.

"What have you got in the bag?" asked the man.

"A few things for the night, I am going out of town," said Ben. He returned to the flat and found Clinch in his rooms.

"Lock the door," said the Captain, and he did so.

"Let me look at it?"

Ben opened the bag and took out the Cup, Clinch felt the weight.

"Seems solid," he said, "what is it worth?"

"Five hundred as it stands"

"Good, I'll keep it"

"Better melt it down, it will be safer," said Ben

"I have a reason for keeping it"

"What is it?"

"Never mind, that's my business"

"As you please, I want some money"

"Can't you wait until I have settled with Douglas. I have had a bad week"

"No, I can't, I am short. Let me have ten pounds for to night," said Ben

Clinch opened the safe, put the Cup inside, then gave Ben the sovereigns.

"You managed it well," he said, "it is one of the neatest things you have done"

"I flatter myself it is, if that fool of a fellow hadn't gone to see the finish I could not have got it"

"I'm thinking how to pay Jim Ames out," said Clinch

"Let that rest for a while, you will be able to do him a bad turn better when everything is forgotten," said Ben

"Where are you going?" asked Clinch

"To meet Abel"

"Bring him here for supper"

"I'll see about it, he'll be in a bad temper"

"Then he'll have to get out of it"

"Are you hard hit?" asked Ben

"The five thousand from Douglas will pull me round, I fancy I can manage the rest," said Clinch

Ben left him. When he was alone Clinch took out the Cup and looked at it, he opened a pint bottle of champagne and poured the sparkling liquid in, it bubbled and frothed in the gold, he raised it to his lips and drank

"Here's to your victory Dick Douglas," he said, "and here's to my win"

At Netherby Hall the chief topic of conversation was Trixie's splendid victory, and the mysterious loss of the Gold Cup

"What do you think Robson says?" asked Dick

"Whatever it is it is worth taking notice of," answered Bob.

"He believes Clinch had a hand in it"

"By jove, I shouldn't wonder if he had!" exclaimed Bob

"You always think Joe is infallible," said Betty

"He could not have taken it," said Dick

"But one of his mates might," said Bob.

"He is sure to turn up to claim his wager," said Dick

"It's jolly hard luck on you, old chap," said Bob.

"Something tells me the Cup will be found"

"Let us hope so," said Betty, "we must motor over to Cottstone and tell your father all about it, Bobby"

"All right, come along I hope he's in one of his best moods," said Bob

When they arrived at Cottstone, Lord Lovett said,

"Did she win, Betty?"

"Yes, easily"

"I'm glad of it, you put the hundred on?"

"Yes, even money"

"What," he said in a loud voice, "only an even hundred."

"I was fortunate to get that," she replied

"Those rascally bookmakers know how to make money," he said

"She won easily, it was a grand victory," said Bob

"How much had you on?" asked his father

"A thousand"

"A third of your annual income, you are a fool, Bob"

"She won," he answered

"And supposing she had lost, you would have expected me to pay"

"Oh, no, Betty and I could have cut down expenses for the rest of the year"

"I have heard a good deal about cutting down expenses since you were married," said Lord Lovett, "but I fail to note where the pruning commences"

"There's something else," said Betty "Dick has met with a misfortune"

"Eh! Didn't he back his own mare?" said Lord Lovett

"Yes, and won a considerable amount, but the Gold Cup was stolen," said Betty

"Bless the gull, what do you mean?"

"What I say, someone stole the Cup from the stand in the paddock"

"Gross carelessness, it will have to be replaced, they will have to make a duplicate," said Lord Lovett

"No doubt that will be done," she said, "but there is no time before to-morrow night"

"Why to-morrow night? Can't he wait a week or two?"

"Dick made a wager of five thousand pounds with Captain Clinch, that the mare would win and that we all drank her health out of the Gold Cup the night after the race," said Betty.

"But that cannot be done if the Cup is stolen"

"Quite so and therefore Dick will lose his wager," said Betty

"No gentleman would accept payment under the circumstances," said Lord Lovett

"Captain Clinch will demand the money, you bet," said Bob

"I do not bet. Speak English," growled Lord Lovett.
"Who is Captain Clinch?"

Bob explained and Lord Lovett said,

"It serves Dick right for having transactions with such a fellow. Tell him I would have come to Netherby to drink his health out of the Cup, as it is stolen I shall remain at home"

"He will be very disappointed," said Betty

"He will be nothing of the kind, don't be a humbug, Betty," said Lord Lovett

"Why will you not believe Dick likes you?" she said

"Because I am sure he does not, there is no reason why he should"

"There is an excellent reason, you are my father-in-law."

Lord Lovett laughed,

"I wish you had a mother-in-law as well," he said

"You are quite sufficient, father," said Bob

The old man glared at him as he said,

"You ought to speak with more respect"

"I meant you were a host in your self," said Bob

"Don't make matters worse I know what you intended to convey," growled Lord Lovett

"Why are you always so cross with Bobby? I am sure he is a very good son, he never causes you any anxiety?" said Betty

"That is because I have always looked after him, I warn you again, Betty, that he has no ballast, keep your eyes on him," said Lord Lovett

"We are returning to Netherby to night," she said "The motor is outside, will you come? I will see to your comfort and we will drive slowly"

"That will be a change for the better," he said "I hate motors, nasty, noisy, smelling horrible things, they are a danger on the public highways they ought to be abolished by act of Parliament They are juggernaut cars, abominations, they ruin the country lanes, spoil all the hedges, cover the land with foul dust I would make an effort and attend at the House if a bill was brought up to do away with them"

Betty laughed, as she said shyly,

"But you have ridden in ours and said how nice and comfortable it was"

"You induced me to go in it, I thought it the most awful experience I ever had"

"But you were comfortable," she protested

"Was I? Then it was owing to your attention"

"And if you will return with us to Netherby, I promise you shall have a most enjoyable ride"

"I will not risk it Is that the beastly thing snorting outside?" asked Lord Lovett, as a whirring sound was heard.

"It's anxious to be off," said Bobby.

"Is it indeed? Then start it, let it run down the steep incline into the lake and be swamped," grumbled Lord Lovett.

98 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Quite sculptural," said Bob, with a smile.

"Don't irritate me," thundered his father.

"Be quiet, you ought to know better," said Betty.

"So he ought, you are quite right, my dear."

Betty kissed him as she said good-night.

Lord Lovett looked at her bright, happy face and sighed; she always made him wish he were young again, she was so full of life and vitality.

"Bob you've got a treasure, take care of her," he said.

"She is a source of constant anxiety," said Bob. "Valuables always are."

"You are incorrigible," said Lord Lovett. "Cannot you be serious for a moment?"

"Certainly, for moments at a time," said Bob. "Good-night, sir."

"Get out," roared his lordship.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN CLINCH'S FLAT

THE morning after Cup day Captain Clinch was in his rooms, he wished it was time to go to Woodcote for the races, from there he would go on to Netherby Hall to claim his wager. Things had not gone well with him of late, he had lost a good deal of money, he would have to part with some of his jewellery, and it was dangerous to dispose of. He was surprised when a rap was heard on the door, it was only ten o'clock—who could it be so early? Opening the door, he was surprised beyond measure to see Mrs Edgar.

"Come in," he said. "To what am I indebted for the honour of such an early visit from one of the most fascinating of her sex? Have you come to gloat over my misfortune of yesterday?"

"No, I am here on a very different errand," she said.

After the Cup race Joe Robson had gone to his sister's, and during a chat with Miss Edgar she confided in him who and what Clinch was, how she had known him in New York, what had happened there between them. She also told him about the attempt of Clinch, Ben Blower and Abel Ash, to steal Trixie, and that the reason she could not explain this when she was found with Dick Douglas in the box was her fear that Clinch would circulate some horrible scandal about her. She asked Joe's advice and he, after thanking her for her confidence, said it would be better for her to tell everything to Dick Douglas, and then to Dick and Mat Lawson. When that was done he said everything would be right between Dick and Dick, and he hoped

she would not forget her promise to become Mrs Robson. He was not surprised to hear what she said, he had guessed she had known Clinch years before, he was very proud of the confidence she placed in him. He told her he had an idea Clinch knew where the Gold Cup was, that he had planned the theft in order to win his wager with Dick Douglas.

When he left Mrs Edgar thought over all he had said. She made a bold resolve. She would go to town early next morning, see Clinch, and tell him she was sick and tired of so much deception, and that she was determined to make a clean breast of it to Dick Douglas. If she did so she thought he might be frightened, clear out, and not go to Netherby Hall to claim his wager. She ought to have known him better, she should have guessed that Clinch, driven into a corner, would fight to the last gasp, that he would deny everything and dare her to do her worst. More than all she ought to have avoided going to his rooms alone. She was, however, eager to relieve herself of the burden Clinch's threat imposed on her, and Joe's suggestions urged her forward. It would, she thought, be far better in every way if Clinch left the country before she explained everything to Dick Douglas.

She took a taxi, explaining to Joe's sister that she had to see a friend early, but would be back in good time, they were not going to the races that day. She knew where Clinch's rooms were, having seen an envelope addressed by Joe Robson to him.

"What is your errand?" said Clinch. "Will you sit down?"

"No thanks, I prefer to stand," she said.

"As you please," he said, sitting down in his chair. "Now perhaps you will explain the object of your visit."

"I am here to tell you that I will not keep your secret any longer, that I will not be crushed by this burden of deceit you have placed upon me. I intend making a clean breast of everything," she said quickly, with a tremor in her voice.

During the time she was speaking Clinch had not even turned his head, he sat back smoking, watching the wreaths curling in the air, as she finished he turned his head slightly and said,

"Anything more?"

She seemed surprised he accepted her statement so calmly, he could not realise the seriousness of his position, she must be more explicit.

"I mean to inform Mr Douglas that you, and your accomplices, attempted to steal the mare from my brother's, that I caught you in the act and let you go because I was foolishly afraid of what you might say," she said.

"Is that all?" asked Clinch.

His calmness irritated her.

"I will tell them you are a thief, a card sharper, a burglar, and perhaps worse. I will tell them all I learned about you

100 The Chance of a Lifetime

in America, and what I suspect you are over here. You had better leave the country while you have time, at once, to-day, it is your only chance. The police will be only too glad to hear of your whereabouts. Pinkerton's want you, but cannot manage to fasten anything on to you, clever as they are, but they will take a hint from me, and then they will apprehend you and search these rooms," she said. Watching him closely, she saw she had roused him at last, although he only made a slight movement. He was considering what she said, how he should act? If she did as she threatened, and the rooms were searched, he would be lost. Would it be better for him to leave England? The mere idea of it roused the fighting blood in him, he would not be browbeaten by a woman, he would try another way.

"So you think I shall accept my fate calmly and clear out," he said rising from his chair.

"It will be the best for you, I ought not to give you a chance."

"Very kind of you. I am sure to offer it me," he said, "but I shall not accept it."

"You will remain here?"

"Yes."

"Then you can guess what will happen?" she said.

"I think so, I have a pretty good idea."

"You will be arrested."

"I hope to convince you that it will not be in your interests to do anything so foolish as you have stated."

"You cannot do that."

"In New York," he said, "you resided under my roof, our relations were perfectly honourable. You see I allow that, and I did you no harm."

"No harm!" she exclaimed, "when you circulated terrible scandals about me."

"I beg your pardon, I did not."

"But you did not contradict the lying reports that were going about as to our relationship."

"I did not think it necessary," he said. "Your conduct was always so circumspect."

"You are wasting time, and words," she said.

He came nearer to her.

"Listen to me," he said. "I like you, I have always liked you, you fascinate me, you are a fine woman. Throw in your lot with mine. I am fairly rich, together we can do much, and I will give you all I can. Why should we be enemies, when it would be so much better if we were friends?"

She shuddered, so abhorrent was the idea to her.

Clinch had turned his back and gone to the safe; nearly opposite, on the wall, was a large mirror. She looked in it for a moment as he put the key in and pulled open the door. She

started back, she had some difficulty in preventing herself from crying out. Reflected in the mirror she had, for a second caught sight of the Woodcote Gold Cup in the safe. She was sure of it, there was no other cup like it, she had seen it in the paddock. So Clinch had the Gold Cup, he had either stolen it, or had someone to do it for him, in order to win Dick Douglas's wager, and Joe Robson's suspicions were right.

Clinch heard her move, and looked round hastily as he shut the door, the keys were in his hand for a moment, he put them on the top of the sideboard, the safe key lying out from the others; then he went towards her with a case in his hand. He had told Jim Ames that diamonds would buy any woman, he really believed it, such had been his experience.

"Did you speak?" he asked, looking at her, thinking she was white and startled.

"No."

"Look at these," he said, handing her the bracelet he had shown Jim Ames, and a beautiful diamond necklet, the spoil from Mrs Powerscourt.

She did not take them.

"They are diamonds," he said, and his eyes lingered on them, "very good stones, do you not like diamonds?"

"Yes, when they are honestly come by," she said.

He scowled at her, his face was not good to look at.

"These are honestly come by," he said, "and they are stones of the first water. If you will join forces with me you shall have many diamonds."

"You dare to try and buy me with jewels?" she said angrily.

"Most women love diamonds," he said.

"I will not touch them, take them away," she said, shrinking from him.

"You refuse the diamonds and my offer?"

"I do."

"Very well," he said as he replaced them in the safe, shut the door, locked it and again placed the keys on the sideboard carelessly, it was a strange thing for him to do, but his mind was busily occupied.

"Are you determined to expose me, as you call it?" he asked.

"I am going to clear myself, I will no longer be under your control."

"Do you think your story will be believed?"

"Yes."

"It will not; in the first place it is highly improbable. No one will credit that I and two others tried to take the mare away, that you saw us, and said nothing about it; the story is too utterly impossible," he said.

"Not when my explanation is given," she said.

102 The Chance of a Lifetime

"And when do you propose to tell your story?" he asked.

"Before to-night," she said.

"I see, in order that Dick Douglas may get out of his wager I shall be at Netherby to claim it."

"You dare not go there," she said.

"I dare do more than that as you will find out. Promise to keep quiet or I will not let you leave this room," he said, as he went towards the door.

What would he do? She was at his mercy, should she call for help. She was about to do so when there was a knock at the door. Clinch swore, she felt a tremendous sense of relief, of danger averted. Another knock, impatient, and Clinch opened the door.

Joe Robson entered the room, and looked in surprise at Mrs Edgar.

CHAPTER XXV

MRS EDGAR'S SURPRISE

MRS EDGAR in Captain Clinch's room, why was she here? thought Joe.

She was confused for a moment, but quickly recovered.

"I came to see him about a personal matter," she said.

He guessed she referred to their conversation of the night before, he thought she might have told him she intended seeing Clinch in the morning.

"And I came about an account outstanding from last week," said Joe.

"That is easily settled," said Clinch, "if you will step round to the Club, it will not take more than a few minutes."

"Will you wait here until I return?" said Joe to Mrs Edgar.

She was anxious to get the Gold Cup, but so far had not been able to reach the sideboard on which she saw the keys, the one belonging to the safe apart from the others on the bunch. How was she to create a diversion so that she might manoeuvre to take it?

"You came just in time," she said to Joe.

"Why, was anything the matter?" he asked.

"Things were commencing to look ugly," she said.

"In what way?"

"He made a proposition to me which I keenly resented, he insulted me," she said.

Joe looked at Clinch, he was a big, powerful man, fully a match for the Captain. As they were occupied in glaring at each other she went round the table, standing with her back to the sideboard.

"Oh, he insulted you, did he?" said Joe savagely.

"When you knocked at the door he was about to lock it, he

The Chance of a Lifetime 103

threatened me, said I should not leave the room. I do not know what he would have done, he had a brutal look on his face," she said.

"You scoundrel," said Joe, moving towards him in a threatening attitude. Clinch prepared to defend himself, his whole attention was fixed on his antagonist, they were at the other end of the room. Clinch had his back to her. She picked up the keys, by the safe key, and held them behind her, as Clinch did not look in her direction she turned round quickly and fortunately succeeded in slipping it off the bunch and into her pocket, she replaced the others on the sideboard.

"Do not touch him," she said to Joe. "Let him alone. You arrived in time, there is no danger now."

"I will take care of that, he deserves a thrashing," said Joe.

Clinch smiled sarcastically, as he said,

"Are you prepared to give it me, at present you are shielding yourself behind her suggestion, she knows me, it is just as well you have taken her advice," said Clinch.

"Do you suppose I am afraid of you?" asked Joe.

"I think I could put fear into you if you laid hands on me," said Clinch. "Let us drop this. You are here for money, very well, you shall have it. I draw five thousand from Douglas to-night, you booked that wager."

"I did, I thought it a foolish arrangement at the time."

"On his part it has turned out badly. You may remain here if you wish to wait for your escort," said Clinch to Mrs. Edgar.

"Only for a few minutes, I feel faint after the excitement."

She went slowly to a chair, Joe stepped quickly across to help her.

"I do not like to leave you," he said.

"I shall be quite safe here," she said, "and you will not be long, don't be surprised if I am gone when you return, I do not care to stay in his room longer than necessary."

"Come along," said Clinch, "the sooner we settle the better."

He was about to leave the room when he remembered his keys. Going to the cabinet he picked them up, holding them in his hand. It was a trying moment for her, would he discover that the key of the safe was missing? Everything depended upon that.

Clinch tried the handle of the safe, found it locked, and put the keys in his pocket, as he did so he looked at her and smiled.

They went out, shutting the door. She stepped quickly across the room and listened, she heard the footsteps die away, then cautiously opened the door and peeped out there was no one about. Turning the key in the lock she went back to the safe. With trembling hands she opened it, took out the Gold Cup, then shut it again and locked it.

104 The Chance of a Lifetime

She put the Cup under her cloak, after covering it with her handkerchief as much as possible, pulled it close round her and hurried out of the room, taking the key of the safe with her. She did not use the lift, but went downstairs slowly, without attracting attention. She hailed a taxi and was taken back to Miss Robson's house. She contrived to hide the cup in her box without being seen. She smiled as she thought it was the second time the Cup had been stolen.

Meanwhile Clinch and Joe Robson had settled affairs and returned to his rooms.

"She's gone," said Clinch.

"I am not surprised," said Joe. "She has told me a good deal about you, sufficient to convince me you are not what you pretend to be."

Clinch wondered how much she had told.

"She had better keep her tongue still or I'll ruin her reputation," said Clinch.

"You cannot," said Joe.

"You are mistaken, I can do so and easily, I could convince you."

"I've no time to waste," said Joe. "I must catch my train to Woodcote."

"I am going," said Clinch.

"We will travel separately, if it's all the same to you," said Joe.

"I am sure I do not want your company," said Clinch, as the bookmaker left the room.

"It was a bit of bluff giving him that cheque," muttered Clinch.

"I don't suppose he'll try and cash it to-day, he'll not have much time, if he does he'll not get the money."

He left the room without trying the safe again, or taking the keys out of his pocket.

Mrs. Edgar was very anxious to take the Cup to Netherby Hall. Naturally, she had no intention of going had it not been to deliver the Cup to Dick Douglas, so that he might win his wager.

She arrived at the Hall before the party returned from the races. She asked that Mr. Douglas might be informed of her presence in the house as soon as he came in.

This was done, he wondered what brought her there, and went to the room in which she awaited him. She had prepared a surprise, the Gold Cup stood on a table, hidden by a newspaper.

"I am glad to see you," he said, "have you anything important to tell me?"

"Yes. Shall we be interrupted?" she asked.

"No, I will just tell my sister you are here and that it is most important we should not be interrupted for half-an-hour or so."

He left the room and informed Betty of Mrs. Edgar's desire for a private interview.

"I wonder what it is about?" she said

"Something that may put matters straight between Di and myself probably, I have had a presentiment that to-night will be a fated time for us," he said

"I hope it is so," said Retty, "let me know when I can see her."

He promised and returned to the room

"It is rather a long story," said Mrs Edgar, and at his request she proceeded

As she went on, explaining about her relations in New York with Francis Edgar, now Captain Clinch, Dick looked at her wonderingly

"So you received the first shock when you saw him at the sale?" he said

"Yes, and my life has been unhappy ever since. His threats of exposure hanging over my head, what could I do but submit?"

When she came to relate how she found Clinch leading Trixie out of the box, Dick's amazement increased

"I let them go," she said "promising to keep silent, on condition the mare was put back in her box, that was the reason I could not give a full explanation to satisfy Mat and Di, I dreaded what Clinch might say"

Dick praised her for her plucky conduct, he understood now how the affair had come about

She had more to tell. She related how she had told Joe Robson and he advised her to declare everything to Dick and get rid of Clinch's threat. She said how she went to Clinch's flat, threatened to expose him and how Joe Robson arrived in the nick of time. She said Clinch was defiant, that he would come to the Hall to-night to claim his wagon, in spite of all

"But he will not get it," she said. "He will have to pay, not you"

Dick was more and more surprised and said,

"But the Cup is lost, we cannot drink out of it"

"It was lost, it is found," she said. "Clinch hid it in his possession"

"Good heavens, how did you find that out?" asked Dick

She told him, explained how she got the key off the bunch, opened the safe and abstracted the Cup

"Where is it?" asked Dick, hardly crediting what she said

"Here," she answered, whipping the newspaper away, and disclosing the Gold Cup

Dick looked at it wonderingly. There it was. The stolen Cup, standing on his table. He took it up, examining it, looking at Mrs Edgar, then back again at the Cup

"There's not another woman could have done what you have done," he said.

106 The Chance of a Lifetime

"I think your sister or Di would have acted as I did under similar circumstances," she said.

"They might, I doubt it, you are a brave woman. I have a plan," he said briskly.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Do not mention about the recovery of the Cup to anyone, I mean to spring a surprise," he said.

CHAPTER XXVI CLINCH AT THE HALL

"WHERE'S Dick?" asked Bob, "he's a deuce of a time away, we are all waiting for him."

"He will be here soon," said Betty. "There are some important matters require his attention, he was told about them as soon as he came in."

"I'll go and hunt him up."

"Don't, Bobby, you must not, he gave me strict orders to keep everyone out of his room."

"That does not apply to me."

"In this instance, yes."

"Confound it, what's all the mystery about?"

"Wait until later, then you will be enlightened."

"Do you know?"

"Have not the slightest idea," she said.

"Oh, come, tell me, Betty."

"If I knew I would not tell you, as I do not, it is impossible."

"The mystery of Netherby Hall in four acts," said Bob.

Betty laughed, and asked if he was cast for the heavy villain.

"Light comedy is more in my line," he said.

Dick sent Mrs Edgar into a private room, he wished her to remain unseen until the time arrived for her appearance in the Hall.

When alone he wrote a letter to Mat asking him to bring Di over, as there was a full explanation of everything that actually took place on the night he and Mrs Edgar were found in Trixie's box.

"It is a most extraordinary story, you must hear it for yourself. Your sister is here. She has told me all, and she will tell you and Di. I am sure you will be as surprised as I was. Do not hint to Di as to the nature of your visit, bring her, tell her I wish it, that Betty wishes it, that we all do. This is going to be a night of glorious surprises. Bring Trixie along with you, she ought to be present when we drink to the victory out of a Cup, if not *the* Cup."

Mat was puzzled at this letter. What had his sister to dis-

close, evidently something of importance? Ever since he had hastily bidden her leave his house he had regretted it, he did not in his heart believe she had done anything wrong. Perhaps to-night would see everything right again. There was no time to lose, he sent for Di, explained what was required, that they must go to Netherby Hall at once.

"But why are we to go?" she asked.

"Never mind the reason. You will learn all in good time," he said. "Sufficient that Mr Richard wishes us to go. Send Phil, he must take Trixie over at once."

"To the Hall?" asked Di, surprised.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I do not know, he wishes her to be there when we drink to the victory."

"But there will be no Cup," said Di.

"He says there will be a Cup if not the Cup."

"It's a most mysterious proceeding," she said.

"You must make haste, my girl, we have no time to lose," said Mat.

In due course Mat and Di arrived at the Hall. Dinner was over, the men were sitting round the festive board. Dick left and went to see them. He shook hands with them and said,

"I am glad you are here, Di, I have a surprise in store for you. Is the mare here?"

"She will be shortly," said Mat.

"Clinch is coming," said Dick.

"To claim his wages."

"Yes."

"He has no right to ask for it as the Cup is stolen."

"But he will, I have had a note from him saying he will be here."

"I am told he has been hard hit," said Mat.

"No doubt about that," said Dick.

"What do you want the mare for?" asked Mat.

"I am going to show Clinch where she was hidden on the day of the sale."

"Never!" exclaimed Mat.

"I am, and I will lead her downstairs into the Hall."

"What an eye-opener," said Mat laughing.

Di was nervous, this was all very well, but how was everything to be explained away, and she and Dick come together again?

Dick noticed her uneasiness and thought,

"You deserve to be kept in suspense for doubting me."

"There's the mare," said Mat, as he listened.

Dick opened the hall door and looked out. It was a beautiful warm June night, Phil stood outside holding Trixie.

108 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Bring her in," said Dick.

"Inside?" asked the astonished Phil.

"Yes," said Dick laughing.

Trixie came into the hall. The noise in the dining-room increased, evidently the party were making merry to good purpose.

"Keep a hand on that door, Mat, better still, 'lock it,'" said Dick.

The key was turned and the oysterers were safe.

Dick took Trixie by the bridle.

"You are to come upstairs again," he said.

He led her to the stairs, she evidently knew what was required, and as he led her up Phil stared in astonishment.

"Dash my buttons! that's not the rummiest thing I've ever seen," he said.

Dick led her along the landing and into his room, then said to Phil,

"Come upstairs and look after her. I will tell you when she is to come out."

Phil did so. When he entered the room he said,

"Why, it's a bedroom!"

"Mum," said Dick. "We hid her here on the day of the sale."

Phil doubled up with laughter.

"What a joke!" he exclaimed.

Mat unlocked the door, but none of the revellers came out.

Dick was about to take Mat and Di to Mrs Edgar when a knock was heard at the hall door.

A servant opened it and Clinch entered.

He was perfectly cool, well dressed, had on expensive clothes, fitting him perfectly.

"Good-evening," he said to them. "I am not late, I think."

"No, about the time you mentioned," said Dick. "One moment, excuse me."

He called the servant and gave her some instructions.

"Tell her," he said, "to wait there until I ask her to come in, she must bring the Cup with her."

Clinch was rather surprised to see Mat and Di present, he thought it was all over between her and Dick Douglas. He heard the noise in the dining-room and said,

"They are making merry over the victory."

"Yes. Most of them won," said Dick.

"I have not had a bad week," said the Captain calmly.

Mat looked at Dick and smiled.

Bob came out of the dining-room.

"You here, Captain, I suppose you have come to join in our festivities and drink to Trixie's victory. I always said she would beat the Broker."

"You are a good judge, I believe," said Clinch sarcastically.

Several more came into the hall, the majority greeted Clinch coldly.

Lady Betty took Di on one side and talked earnestly to her.

"You were lucky to win the race," said Clinch. "If the sale here had been fairly conducted I should have bought the mare."

"There was nothing unfair about it," said Dick. "The reserve was paid."

"True, but not until after the mare was spirited away, and it was considerably past the time when she ought to have been put up for sale—that was not at all fair to buyers."

"She was in the stall again soon after the money was forthcoming," said Dick.

"Yes, and I can't think where she was hidden, it was cleverly done," said Clinch.

"Should you like to know where she was stowed away?" asked Dick.

"Very much, it has often puzzled me."

"We'd all like to know about it, Dick," said some of the guests.

"Very well, I will show you," he said and went upstairs.

There was a general laugh and someone said,

"You don't expect us to believe she was hidden up there?"

"Don't be too sure about it," said Dick as he opened the bedroom door.

"Bring her out, Phil."

There was a shout of astonishment when Trixie came on to the landing. The noise made her prick her ears.

"Steady, old girl," said Dick, "there's no race on."

Trixie tossed her head and looked over the banisters at the people in the hall.

Clinch said nothing, he was thinking this was about as clever a thing as he had ever managed.

Dick brought the mare downstairs into the hall, they crowded round her.

"Stand back," said Mat. "Remember she's as fit as can be, she might lash out, there's no vice in her, but she's a trifle playful sometimes."

They made a circle round her, it was a pretty picture to see her holding a reception of her admirers.

They had all won money over her, the only regret was that the Gold Cup had been stolen and their host had lost his wager.

Captain Clinch was regarded with no friendly eyes as he stood alone, isolated. Not one of the men present would have claimed the wager under the circumstances, they knew Clinch was there to get the .. termost farthing.

"Very clever trick," said Clinch. "Most remarkable display of originality."

"I cannot claim credit for the idea," said Dick.

110 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Whose was it?"

"Mat's."

"I really did not think he had it in him," said Clinch.

"There's more in Mat than you would credit," said Dick.

"He was clever enough to beat the Broker," said Bob.

"It was a lucky win," said Clinch meaningly.

Di looked round quickly, she knew what he meant.

"What is it?" asked Betty.

"Oh, nothing of importance," said Di, "I was merely thinking of something Clinch's remark called to mind."

"About the race?" asked Betty.

"Yes."

"Before or after?"

"Before," said Di.

"I think I can guess what it was, I saw you talking to Jun Ames," said Betty.

"Then please do not try," said Di, and Betty smiled.

"It was fair," she thought.

CHAPTER XXVII

COOL TO THE LAST

"YOU have shown me how you hid the mate," said Clinch, "it is a pity you cannot produce the Gold Cup and win your wager."

"I can," said Dick, calmly.

Captain Clinch lost his balance for a moment, the shock was unexpected. Recovering himself, he smiled, it was impossible for him to produce the Cup, it was locked up in the safe in his rooms.

The others looked on in surprise, Bob stared as he said,

"You're joking, Dick, you don't mean to say you have found the Gold Cup?"

"Wait," answered Dick, as he left the room.

A few moments later he returned with Mrs. Edgar, she carried the Gold Cup in her hand, holding it up as she came into the hall.

"Here is the Gold Cup," he said.

They crowded round, examining it, no doubt it was the Woodcote Cup, or its double.

Clinch never flinched, it could not be the real Cup. Stepping forward he said, as he looked at it,

"A very good imitation and quickly made, but I want the real Cup produced, a substitute will not win your wager."

"It is not a substitute, it is the Cup that was stolen from the stand at Woodcote," said Mrs. Edgar.

Clinch laughed, when he scented danger he was always alive, keen for battle, full of resource.

"A likely tale that," he said "If it is the Gold Cup where did you obtain it?"

"Where did it come from?" said Bob. "I'd swear to its being the real thing, tell us."

Mrs Edgar faced Clinch and said,

"I stole it from the thief!"

"You stole it!" exclaimed half-a-dozen

"Yes," said Mrs Edgar smiling, "it has been stolen twice

Clinch was still smiling, the Cup was in his safe the key in his pocket

"That story is too highly coloured," he said "No one can believe it Where did you get this Cup from?"

"I took it from the safe in your room," said Mrs Edgar, never flinching "Here is the key," and she flung it at his feet

Clinch saw it, recognised it, how had she obtained it?

"That is not the key of my safe," he said

"Is your key on your bunch?"

"Yes"

"Let us see," said Dick

Clinch drew them from his pocket, he felt the key was missing before doing so—what a fool he had been!

"Is the key there?" asked Bob

"Yes, this is it," said Clinch

"It is not," said Mrs Edgar "This is," and she picked up the one she had thrown down

It was a dramatic scene, everyone felt the tension, all listened to hear more

"Then you accuse me of stealing the Cup?" said Clinch

"You, or one of your confederates," she said

"If the Cup was in my safe and you took it away, you must have been in my room," said Clinch.

"I was," she said

They looked at her, what was she doing in his room?

"I went there and saw you," she said "You opened the safe to take out some jewellery I saw the reflection of the cup in the mirror, and determined to obtain possession of it You placed the keys on the cabinet. When Mr Robson came in you had an altercation with him, while you were quarrelling I moved round to the cabinet and took the key off the bunch, when you left with him, to go to your club, I opened the safe and took it out, this is it"

Clinch saw how it was done, he remembered he had not looked to see if the key was on when he picked up the bunch, but he resolved to bring it out.

"The story is a lie," he said, "she came to my rooms, we are old acquaintances, I met her in New York, she was my——"

"Stop," said Dick, "let us hear her story."

112 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Yes, yes, Mrs Edgar's story," they called out

Before Clinch had time to go on again she commenced. At first she was nervous, but gradually, as she thought of her wrongs at his hands, she plucked up courage and became eloquent and convincing. They listened eagerly. Di and her father were much agitated. Mrs Edgar told the story of her life in New York as it has already been related. She told of Clinch's perfidy, how he damaged her reputation, and threatened her with exposure, if she revealed who he was, when they met at the Hall sale.

"He tried to ruin me in New York," she said, shivering, "he has made my life miserable since we met in England. His name is not Francis Clinch, it is Francis Edgar, the brother of the man I married."

There was a murmur of surprise all eyes were fixed on Clinch, who stood alone unmoved.

"Pon my word, he talks it coolly," said Bob to his wife. "Hanged if one can help admiring the fellow, consummate scoundrel."

The terrible threats he held over my head frightened me," she went on. "I was living with my brother and my niece, Di, whom I love dearly, I decided what they would think if they heard his story, he even went so far as to say he would accuse me of my husband's death."

"Shame," said several voices.

"I will now come to the night I was found in Trixie's box with Mr Douglas, and a misunderstanding arose through which his engagement with my niece was broken off, and my brother told me to leave his house."

Her voice faltered a little, Di and her father were much moved.

"That night when an explanation was asked, I said no one had been seen about, that I saw no one, it was not true. I saw three men. "He," pointing to Clinch, "was one of them."

This caused a sensation,--so Clinch had attempted to nobble the mare.

"Scoundrel," said Mat, much agitated. Di was in tears, she began to understand, saw how unjust she had been to her aunt and Dick--why had she not had faith in them?

"There were two other," she said, "a man called Blower and Abel Ash."

"The jockey. The rider of the Broker," was heard in different parts of the hall.

"He was leading the mare out of the stable as I came into the yard. When they saw me they were much alarmed. I spoke to him, said if he did not put the mare back I would call for help. I was frightened, nervous, he said if I called he would expose me, say the most terrible things against me. I was

The 'Chance of a Lifetime' 113

weak, cowardly, I dare not face it, so I said that if he would put the mare back in her box I would let them go. He agreed on condition I said nothing about them having been there; this I promised and they left. A minute or two later Mr Douglas came out of the cottage, we entered the box and found Trixie safe. I explained to him that I thought I heard a noise, but found no one about. When the others came out I dare not give any further information."

She looked at Di and Mat. Some of those present had a glimmering of the truth, saw how the estrangement had come about. Bob and his wife knew more, they had always trusted her and Dick.

Mat came forward, and, taking his sister by the hand, said, "Forgive me for doubting you. I beg your pardon, I am sorry, very sorry."

She kissed him, it was an affecting scene, but when Di clasped her arms round her and sobbed on her shoulder, many, even of the men, had moist eyes.

There was silence. Clinch stood looking on with a sardonic smile, his arms folded.

Mat went to Dick.

"Mr Richard, I did you a grave wrong, I can only say I regret it, and ask you to pardon an old man's fault."

"Which I readily do, Mat, here's my hand. After all appearances were against us."

"I shall never go by appearances again," said Mat.

Mrs Edgar led Di up to Dick.

Before them all, he said, in a clear voice,

"Di, you were my promised wife. You broke off our engagement, will you renew it, will you be my wife?"

"I am so ashamed of ever having doubted you," she said, looking into his face with streaming eyes. "If you will take me back I will be your wife."

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

The pent up feelings of his guests at last broke loose. Cheer after cheer made the hall ring with joyous shout. It was a stirring scene. Trixie became restive, Mat and Dick calmed her with soothing words and pats.

All crowded round offering congratulations; standing apart stood Clinch, the beaten man, still smiling.

"Come," said Dick, "fill the cup. We will drink to the victory and to my promised wife. Ladies and gentlemen, the chance of a lifetime has come off. Fill up the Cup."

Bob quickly disappeared, returning with two large bottles of champagne, he poured the contents of one into the Cup.

Clinch thought to himself,

"It is not the first drink out of it. I had that."

114 The Chance of a Lifetime

The Cup was passed round, each one sipped the golden liquid then handed it on

"Your turn," said Dick, offering it to Clinch

The Captain took it quietly and had a long drink, then handed it back

"You have lost your wager," said Dick.

"I deny that is the Cup," said Clinch.

"Come, you're fairly cornered. You must give in," said Bob

"He must leave the country," said Mrs Edgar. "He is a dangerous man. He is a well-known hotel thief and sharper, the head of a gang of expert robbers, his plunder is great, he ought to be handed over to the police, but I ask you to let him go, on condition he leaves England"

"Within twenty-four hours," said Dick

There was a general chorus of approval

"What do you say?" asked Dick. "Shall I call the police or do you accept the alternative?"

"I have no option," said Clinch. "I will leave England. Gentlemen, I thank you for your hospitality, I have been in your company many times, we have had wagers together, I am sorry to leave you. If any of you are desirous of communicating with me Mrs Edgar will give you my address. I bid you all a very good night"

He left the hall cool and self possessed as ever. There was an audible sigh of relief when the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

CLINCH left Netherby Hall and walked towards the station. It was a clear, bright night, he could see a good way ahead. He took the road skirting the heath and went at a brisk pace. He was a broken man, so far as his racing career was concerned, he had no intention of paying any wagers, the cheque he had given Joe Robson was worthless. He had a considerable sum of money in his safe, and much valuable jewellery, he had the key in his pocket, and he wondered, as he felt to make sure it was there, why Mrs Edgar had not made better use of her opportunity. Had she? Was the Gold Cup the only thing she had taken? He became anxious about his property, but as he turned the matter over in his mind he knew he had nothing to fear. Mrs Edgar was not that sort of woman. He reckoned up, gave a rough calculation how much money he could raise. He had been given twenty-four hours to clear out, it would be safest to leave England. It was no use returning to New York, the place was too hot to hold him, where should he go? So

The Chance of a Lifetime . 115

deep in thought was he that he did not see the men ahead of him until they were within a few yards, then he recognised Ben Blower and Abel Ash

"So you followed me here," he said to Ben, "and picked Ash up on the way?"

"That's about it," said Ben. "We thought we'd better meet you when you had drawn your wager."

"Yes, and get our share at once," said Ash.

"You don't suppose I received the five thousand in gold?" said Clinch.

"No, in notes," said Ben.

"Not in notes, I took his cheque for it."

"Then you're a fool," said Ben, "he'll stop it."

"No, he will not," said Clinch, "he is not that sort."

"I don't believe he gave you a cheque, I believe you had it in notes," said Ash.

"So do I," said Ben.

"I tell you I was handed a cheque," said Clinch.

"Let's see it," said Ben.

"I do not feel disposed to show it you."

"But we insist on seeing it, we have a share in it," said Ash.

"It all depends upon me whether you receive anything," said Clinch.

"You'd better not go back on your bargain," said Ben.

"I have no such intention," said Clinch.

They were at the station, and Clinch said he was going to London by the last train, would they meet him at his flat at eleven the next morning?

They looked at each other—what had they better do, trust Clinch, or follow him?

The Captain saw they were undecided, and said, with a smile,

"I cannot cash the cheque before ten. I will meet you at eleven."

"You may do a bolt," said Ben.

"Not likely with a cheque for five thousand to cash."

"No, he'll not do that, Ben, there's too much hanging to it," said Ash. "He'd better not try and play any of his games on us."

"What would you do, my brave little man?" asked Clinch, sarcastically.

"Make it mighty unpleasant for you," said Ash.

"I wonder," said Clinch half to himself, "what became of the lid of the Cup."

Ben Blower winked at Abel.

"I wonder," he said.

"Did you lose it?" asked Clinch.

"Why, is it missing?"

"You know it is," said Clinch.

116 The Chance of a Lifetime

"The fact of the matter is," said Ben. "I wanted a little souvenir of the occasion, so I took the lid. Abel's got a bit of it in his pocket."

"Here it is," said the jockey, as he took a piece of gold out of his waistcoat pocket.

"Is that a part of the lid of the Cup?" asked Clinch.

"Yes. Ben melted it down," said Abel.

"And gave you a nugget," said Clinch.

"That's about it."

"Clever rogue," said Clinch to Ben.

"You don't mind, do you, Captain? I thought you wouldn't, you're not greedy, and it did not amount to much."

"I have a good mind to take it out of your share," said Clinch.

"You'll not do that," said Ben hurriedly.

The train was signalled, and Clinch said,

"You will meet me at my rooms at eleven to-morrow morning?"

"Yes," said Ben, "we'll be there, and don't be late."

"Wait for me if I am not in," said Clinch. "I shall return from the bank with the money."

As the train went out of sight Ben said,

"He took that lid business a bit too well, I believe he'll try and slip us up."

"Not he," said Abel, "we are too useful to him."

"You'll not be much use when you are warned off," said Ben.

"Who said I'd be warned off?" asked Abel.

"I say so."

"Ames made no complaint."

"No, but the stewards have eyes."

"Which they don't always use," said Ash.

"They'd have been blind if they'd missed what you did in the Cup race," said Ben.

Clinch went straight to his rooms. The first thing he did after locking the door was to open a packet on the table.

It contained the imitation bracelet he had lent Jim Ames, there was no letter, or explanation, none was needed—Clinch smiled as he looked at it, an idea entered his head. So pleased was he as it expanded, that he laughed and chuckled with glee.

"It's splendid," he muttered, "splendid. I'll do it, it'll be quite easy, they are sure to be here at eleven."

Next morning he took all the gold and notes out of the safe, then removed the jewellery and placed it in a handbag; the paste sets he left in their cases in the safe, he turned the lock and left his keys in, having taken off a couple he required for

The Chance of a Lifetime 117

his bag and leather case. Having done this he packed his belongings in a couple of trunks and sent them downstairs. He explained that he was going away for some time and paid his bill, he hoped he might have the same rooms on his return. The manager assured him he could rely upon it.

"Someone will call at eleven," said Clinch, "tell them to go into the room and wait for me, that I will be back before eleven thirty. Send these trunks to Charing Cross station. Please do not say anything about my movements, nor mention that I have given up the rooms for a time. I may say I wish to go away quietly so that I may have perfect privacy."

"I understand," said the manager. "You do not wish to be bothered with friends seeing you off."

"Exactly so," said Clinch. "I thank you for what you have done for me since I have been here, will you accept this?" and he handed him a note for ten pounds.

The manager was profuse in his thanks.

Clinch walked rapidly to Charing Cross Station, had his baggage registered through to Paris and left by the Continental train.

At eleven o'clock Ben Blower and Abel Ash ascended to Clinch's rooms in the lift.

Before leaving Charing Cross Clinch despatched a brief note, by a taxi driver, giving him a sovereign for his trouble, and to make sure it was delivered.

"Not here!" exclaimed Ben, "we'll wait a bit. Hallo!"

"What is it?" asked Ash.

"He's left the keys in the safe," said Ben.

"No," exclaimed Ash, incredulous.

"Sure enough," said Ben, delighted.

"Say, Ben, I believe he's done a bolt, that's why he forgot to take them out, left 'em in his hurry. Let's look round."

Ash opened several drawers, they were empty, there were no clothes to be seen when he ransacked the bedroom; he was in there a considerable time.

Ben Blower was busy with the contents of the safe, stuffing the jewel cases into his pockets, merely opening them to see if they were empty. Ash put his head round the door.

"He's bolted safe enough, there's not a thing to be seen in here," he said.

"There's plenty here," said Ben, "more than we'd ever have got out of him. He must have had to clear out early and quickly, we'd better be getting, this is not a safe place."

"How much have you got?" asked Abel.

"We can see when we're out of this, come on."

They went down in the lift, two men were talking to the manager.

118 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Are you not going to wait for Captain Clinch?" he asked, as Ben and Abel stepped out.

"Tell him we're coming back in ten minutes," said Ben winking at Abel. "Come on."

"Stop," said the taller of the two men.

Ben looked quickly round.

"What do you mean by that, who are you?" asked Ben.

"Detective Brownson," said the man, "this is my assistant."

Abel Ash felt his knees knocking together. Ben Blower was furiously angry, inwardly he was quaking.

"I must search you," said Brownson.

Ben protested, Ash thanked his stars he had no jewellery in his pockets.

Brownson took out the jewel cases, opened the first and gave an exclamation of surprise, he recognised the set as facsimile of the illustrations of Mrs Powerscourt's jewels. He had got more than he bargained for, he wondered who it was had sent him the note containing such valuable information about these men.

"You will have to come with me," said Brownson.

"Where to?" asked Blower.

"Bow Street."

"Me too!" exclaimed Ash, who looked a miserable object.

"Yes."

"Nothing was found on me," he whined.

"You are this man's companion, that is sufficient," said Brownson, and they were taken away.

CHAPTER XXIX

JIM'S RETAINER

It was the day after the trial of Ben Blower and Abel Ash—they had been committed, the former receiving a sentence of five years penal servitude, the jockey eighteen months hard labour. Nothing came out at the trial about the Gold Cup, but Ben Blower endeavoured to throw the onus of the various thefts on Captain Clinch. In this he partly succeeded, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Clinch, however, had disappeared as completely as though he had vanished off the face of the earth.

They were discussing the trial and its result at Netherby Hall; the conclusion arrived at was that Blower had received his deserts, and that Abel Ash had got off with a light sentence.

Mrs Edgar was intensely relieved at the disappearance of Clinch, and hoped he would not be heard of again. Joe Robson at last succeeded in persuading her to marry him, and the ceremony took place quietly, only a few personal friends being

The Chance of a Lifetime 119

present In the autumn Dick and Di were married in Woodcote Church amidst general rejoicing They were very popular in the district, and people vied with one another in doing them honour

Lord Lovett came out of his shell and sent them a handsome present, this unlooked-for generosity was put down to Betty's credit The Hon. Bob Lovett acted as best man, he kissed the bride when the register was signed, as though he liked it. Betty called him to order and afterwards gave him a severe scolding

"She looked so deuced charming," said Bob, "that I couldn't help it, besides I thought it would be the only chance I'd ever get, Dick's such a jealous beggar"

Netherby Hall seemed to be filled with new life when Di came into it as mistress She was very happy, sometimes it made her serious when she thought how she might have lost all through a misunderstanding

In the Spring, Mat was able to tell Dick he thought they were in for a very good season with their small stable

"You'll engage Jim to ride for you again, I suppose," said Mat

"Of course, I would not have any one else," said Dick

"Then you had better speak to him about it," said Mat

"I will at the first opportunity," answered Dick

He had not long to wait, for Mat sent Jim over to Netherby Hall, telling him Mr Douglas wished to see him

"You will ride for me again this season, I suppose?" said Dick

Jim did not answer at once, at which Dick was surprised.

"I don't know as I ought to," said Jim at last.

"Why on earth not?"

"Because I don't think you'd give me the chance if you knew everything," said Jim

"What is it I ought to know?" asked Dick

"Last year I very nearly threw you over, I intended serving you a nasty trick"

"Did you, why?"

"In the first place because you had robbed me, so I thought, of the girl I loved, in the second place because we had words and were not very good friends," said Jim

"And what did you decide to do?"

"To pull Trixie in the Cup," said Jim

Dick laughed as he said,

"You are romancing, Jim, you would never have done that"

"Clinch was at the bottom of it. He talked me over, said how easily I could be revenged upon you. He offered me five hundred pounds to pull the mare."

120 The Chance of a Lifetime

"And you refused?"

"No, I accepted."

"Then what prevented you from doing it?" asked Dick, amazed at the strange story.

"It was Di, I mean Mrs Douglas, who pointed out to me what a folly I was about to commit, and how wicked it was of me to do it. She persuaded me to ride straight, and I threw Clinch over at the last moment."

"When did this happen?"

"In the paddock, just before the race for the Cup. It was your wife saved me from doing wrong and disgracing myself, and I shall always h's her for it."

"So you intended throwing me over, pulling Tixie in the Cup, and she prevented you. She did us an inestimable service, Jim."

"She did, me especially."

"You acted wrongly," said Dick, "had you not told me yourself I would never have believed it, I always had the greatest confidence in you."

"You'll never have it now," said Jim.

"Yes, I shall, I am sure you will never be tempted again."

"You'll forgive me?"

"Yes, Jim. We are none of us perfect. You committed a grave fault, but I am sure you are sorry for it."

"I am indeed, it will always cause me to be ashamed when I think of it."

"Then do not think of it, try and forget it," said Dick.

Jim shook his head.

"I shall never do that," he said.

"You must ride for me this season. Mat tells me we have good prospects, that we ought to win some races. He thinks Tixie will win the Cup again."

"Does he?" said Jim quickly.

"Yes, he has not much doubt about it."

"And you'll give me the mount on her again after all I have told you?"

"I will, no one rides her as well as you."

"You hear, Jim, how are you?" said Di, as she entered the room.

How radiantly happy and beautiful she looked. Jim felt a queer pang as he thought under other circumstances he might have won her. He put these feelings severely aside, and remembered what she did for him on that memorable Cup day.

"I have just engaged Jim as my jockey for this season," said Dick.

The Chance of a Lifetime 121

"I am so glad," said Di, looking at Jim in a peculiar way.
"I congratulate you both."

"I've told him," blurted out Jim. "I told everything. I could not accept his offer unless I did, and he's been good enough to overlook it."

"And he told me what you did, Di, it was just like you and he is very grateful," said Dick.

"I shall never forget what you saved me from," said Jim.

She was very tender where he was concerned. She knew how he loved her, always would, and pitied him. She went up to him, placed her hand on his shoulder and said,

"We must all forget it, Jim. You were tempted, but you did the right thing in the end, you won on Trixie, that is what we must remember."

"Quite right, Di, we must never forget. Jim rode Trixie and I believe he'll win on her again."

"No!" exclaimed Di.

"Mat says she has a very good chance, that she is as good as ever, has wintered well, and by the summer will be as fit as she was last year," said Dick.

"It would be a glorious thing to win it twice," said Di, "two years in succession."

When Jim left, Dick said to her,

"You kept his secret well, my girl."

"I suppose you thought like all the rest I could not keep a secret?" she said, smiling.

"That was about the strength of it," said Dick, laughing.

"By jove, what a hole I should have been in had Jim pulled Trixie, and it's all owing to you I got out of it. Come and be rewarded," and he held out his arms.

"But some credit is due to Jim for listening and following my advice," she said.

"Supposing he had not," said Dick.

"We'll not think what might have happened," said Di.

Clinch must have been in a terrible state when Jim threw him over at the last moment," said Dick.

"Served him right," said Di. "I wonder what has become of him."

"We shall probably never hear of him again," said Dick, "let us hope he has vanished for ever."

* * * * *

"Bobby, your father wishes to see you," said Betty one morning at Cottstone.

"Where is he?"

"In his room."

"Gouty?"

"Reasonably so."

122 The Chance of a Lifetime

"Then there is some reason in him."

"There always is. I think him a very reasonable man."

"It's more than I do," said Bob, as he went off growling.

"Bob, you are not doing your duty. You are not dealing fairly by me, or the estates, or your wife," said Lord Lovett.

"How have I offended?" asked Bob.

"I do not accuse you of offending, I merely point out that I am much disappointed at the result of your marriage."

"I thought you were very fond of Betty."

"So I am," said Lord Lovett hastily.

"Then whatever is there to growl about?"

"I never assume dog-like attributes," said Lord Lovett, "I do not growl. Cannot you understand what I mean?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are more dense than even I thought you. Go and tell Betty."

"What?"

"All I have said to you."

"About failing to realise your expectations about the estates and so on, that you are disappointed at the result of our marriage?" asked Bob.

"Yes, be off," said Lord Lovett.

Bob met Betty soon after and explained. She looked at him with a bright light in her eyes.

"Go and tell him it's all right," she said softly.

"What's all right?" asked Bob, bewildered.

"Everything," she said.

She looked after him as he went and thought

"Dear old Bobby and he hasn't even guessed."

"Betty says I'm to tell you it's all right," he said.

Lord Lovett forgot his gout, and stood up in his excitement.

"She said that!" he exclaimed, gleefully.

"Yes, but what's it all about, what's all right," asked Bob, with such a curiously bewildered expression on his face that Lord Lovett burst out laughing.

"You mean to tell me you don't know?" said his father, chuckling.

"Upon my word I don't."

"Then go and—go on——" Lord Lovett choked with laughter. "Go and ask Betty," he gasped at last.

The Chance of a Lifetime

123

CHAPTER XXX

TRIXIE AGAIN

WOODCOTE meeting again, the day bright and glorious, as it had been twelve months before. Clinch and his schemes were almost forgotten.

Dick and his wife were in the paddock admiring the Gold Cup.

"I hope it will not be stolen this year," he said.

"That's not likely, I hope Trixie will win it again," said Di.

"The French horse has a big chance," said Dick.

"Maxim?" asked Di.

"Yes, I am told he is the best horse they have sent over for a long time, and he has been specially prepared for the race," said Dick.

"Then there will be the more credit in Trixie beating him," said Di.

Lady Betty was absent, the doctor said she must avoid excitement—Bob had at last found out what his father meant.

Mat Lawson stood talking to Jim Ames.

"Ride her like you did last year," said Mat, "and you'll win if Maxim is not an exceptionally good horse."

Jim once more donned the yellow and black to ride Trixie in the Cup. The mare had hosts of admirers, many judges thought she looked better than on the day she won twelve months ago.

The Frenchmen, however, came across the Channel in large numbers to back Maxim, they would not hear of defeat. The horse was the best stayer in France, had swept the board, carried all before him. The weight of money made him favourite, and there was a lot of support for Reaper, who won the Doncaster Cup last September, and had carried out bold into second place in the Cæsarwitch, Tom Boy, Golden Bay and Rioter were the other runners, in addition to Trixie.

Joe Robson again made his book for the mare, and the Frenchmen were staggered at the way he laid Maxim. He had implicit confidence in Mat Lawson's judgment, and the trainer told him he thought Trixie would win.

Mrs Robson looked a different woman since her marriage. She was happy again, Joe was a most attentive husband, he gave way to her in everything, but she took no advantage of this. Nothing had been heard of Clinch.

Just before the race Jim met Di.

"You have no occasion to give me advice this time," he said, smiling.

"Except that you must not throw a chance away, and win by as many lengths as you can," she said.

124 The Chance of a Lifetime

"If Maxim does his best it will be a question of heads, not lengths, at the finish I fancy," he said.

When the horses started Maxim still held the position of favourite, but Trixie ran him close in the betting. Reaper carried a lot of money, so did Golden Bay and Rioter. Tom Boy, the outsider of the party, made the running and soon held a lead of many lengths. At the end of a mile he began to come back to his field. Rioter headed the other, followed by Maxim, and Golden Bay, with Trixie last. The mare was going well, but appeared to be lying too far back. Jim Ames, however, knew what she could do, he again husbanded her strength for a final run home.

Rioter passed Tom Boy and was followed by Maxim, they raced together, neither giving way, Jim looked on from the rear, amused at these tactics. He knew it was not in Maxim's favour to try and cut down Rioter. They had only five furlongs to go when Jim made his first move on Trixie. She quickly responded, and passed the beaten Tom Boy, then Golden Bay, and galloped alongside Reaper, whose rider had instructions not to lose sight of the mare. The pace was tremendous for the last half mile of a three mile course and it was made by Rioter and Maxim. The French horse was a grand stayer or he would never have stood the strain, when he headed Rioter there was a tremendous shout from the stand. The Frenchmen had every reason to be satisfied, Maxim looked an almost certain winner, there was nothing near him, and only a furlong to go.

Trixie came on with her long sweeping stride, wearing down all opposition. Reaper had at last to give way as she went in pursuit of Maxim.

The Frenchmen saw danger, and shouted frantically to the jockey to send Maxim along.

Crisp looking round saw Trixie coming at a great pace on the outside. It was the first time he had seen the yellow and black in the race, he had been warned against the mare, here she was going at top speed. He set to work and roused Maxim up, but the tussle with Rioter had told its tale and the French horse had very little left in him. Maxim fought a gallant struggle, he was one of the gamiest of the game. Dick, as he looked on, and thought how the horse had been ridden doubted whether he would not have beaten Trixie had Rioter been out of the way. The pair were level, and the noise was deafening. Trixie was the most popular mare on the turf, a public idol, and Jim Ames had many followers.

Maxim was beaten at last, he shot his bolt, and despite the vigorous efforts of Crisp could do no more. Trixie, saved for the finish, came on and won by three lengths from Maxim with Reaper in third place.

The Chance of a Lifetime 125

For the second year in succession Trixie had won the Woodcote Gold Cup, it was a great feat, a remarkable achievement. Dick Douglas was heartily congratulated, so was Mat Lawson, while Jim Ames came in for a great ovation. The Cup was not missing on this occasion, it stood on its pedestal as Dick and his friends went to examine it.

"We assemble at Netherby to-morrow night again," he said "and drink out of the Gold Cup."

"It was a gay scene at Netherby Hall at the close of the meeting. The guests were numerous, the old place was at its best, and amidst it all Di moved about attracting everyone by her grace and beauty. It was she who filled the Cup and handed it round, she would not allow anyone else to do it.

Mrs Robson's mind went back to the memorable evening just twelve months before, when she made her dramatic appearance with the stolen Cup and defeated Clinch's plans. As she was recalling visions of the past a telegram was handed to Dick Douglas. He opened it and read:

"Sorry I cannot be with you. Expect you will again drink Trixie's health. Clinch."

For a moment he was too surprised to speak, he looked at the stamp, it was Charing Cross, and had been handed in half an hour before. Clinch was in London, what a daring rogue he must be!

"Who is it from, Dick?" asked Bob.

"An old acquaintance," he replied, handing him the paper.

"Well, I'm blessed," exclaimed Bob.

"It's from Captain Clinch," said Dick, "and read it to the company."

Mrs Robson turned pale, "From Clinch, where was he?"

Joe hastened to reassure her, wherever Clinch was he was not likely to make himself known to them again.

Clinch was at that moment in Paris, in comfortable rooms, he had asked a friend to send the telegram, when he arrived at Charing Cross, if Trixie won the race.

To win two Woodcote Cups in successive years with the same mare does not fall to the lot of many men, and Dick Douglas regarded this as a lucky omen, a turn in the tide, and such it proved, for his fortunes increased with remarkable rapidity.

Two years after his marriage almost the whole of the debt had been cleared off the names in which he was interested. His racing stud had been remarkably successful. For Trixie he had been offered a very large sum, but he refused to part with her.

The owner of Maxim offered him fifteen thousand for her and it was refused.

Lord Leyett said he was a fool not to take it, no mare was ever worth that amount.

126 The Chance of a Lifetime

Betty held up her son to his grandfather and said,
"Irxie is almost as precious to Dick as little Bobby is to you."

"He's a fine lad, Betty, a very fine lad, he was a long time in making his appearance, but he was worth waiting for."

"I am glad you approve of him," she said, with a smile.
"He's very like his father."

"He's a great deal more like you," said Lord Lovett.

At Netherby Hall there was another fine boy and Mat Lawson was every whit as fond of his grandson as Lord Lovett was of his.

Joe Robson never tired of handling the chubby little fellow, and Dick said it was a pity he had not a child of his own.

"Yes, I think it is," said Joe seriously, as he put down Dick and walked quietly away.

THE END.

Santipur Public Library.

DATE SLIP.

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